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Editorial

With this issue of the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* we mark the commencement of our fifth volume. In our first issue of September 2000 we stated our aim as giving believers in Europe ‘the opportunity to explore issues of theology and practice’. Of course, we do not want to be parochial and from time to time we welcome contributions from scholars in other parts of the world.

In this issue we offer an article by Dr Frank Rees from Whitley College, Australia. Our identity as Baptists is subject to much questioning and certain attempts at revisionism as we approach the 200th Anniversary of the founding of the Baptist World Alliance. Sharing insights from aboriginal culture, Dr Rees moves into offering helpful insights of the baptismal reality, how we understand it and what actions should accompany it if we are called to be people immersed in the mission and life of God.

Then, two members of our lecturing team at IBTS stimulate us with their contributions. Einike Pilli helps us in the crucial area of adult education. In our complex world, where there are so many sophisticated and subtle messages being offered, we must ensure that the learning which we experience in the church has a chance of making a real difference to people so that we, as believers, might in turn make a difference to this world. Meanwhile, Jim Purves struggles with the interface between the place where primary theology is done – the communities of faith – and the secondary theology of academia, and longs to see the gap bridged.

Finally, as the accession countries adapt to the European Union and the majority of the existing members of the EU limit the fundamental EU principle of the freedom of peoples to move in search of employment, Petr Jandejsek gives us insight into how the Roman Catholic Church in the Czech Republic has engaged with the issue of unemployment. This application of theological reflection brings us full circle as we reflect on the many ways we are immersed into the mission of God through our discipleship.

The Revd Keith G Jones
Rector, IBTS

Baptist Identity

Immersed through Worship

In this paper, I want to suggest that a theology of baptism of believers by immersion is the fundamental basis of our identity as Baptist communities. It gives the essential Trinitarian and missionary character to all our worship and our lives as faith communities. In short, if we know what baptism means to us, we also know who we are and how we worship: and not only worship as gathered people, but worship God with all we do and are. We are called to be communities who are immersed in the life of God, in acts and lives of worship.

Story of an Aboriginal Ritual

I would like to begin with a story about a ritual practice which occurs in a number of Australian aboriginal communities. I must explain that I am not part of such a community, and have no place in any such ritual. I know only what I have been told.

First, we need to understand that every baby born into an aboriginal community belongs to a totem group. Family groups have a totem, which is often an animal. For those people, this animal is their direct link with the created order. They belong to this group and one thing they will never do is eat that animal. This totemic system thus ensures the preservation of all the species. It is also the basis for preventing inter-marriage, as you can never marry within your totem group.

When a child is born, she is given a name, and by birth she already belongs to a totem family. Soon after birth, a naming ceremony, as we might call it, occurs. A hole is dug in the earth big enough for the baby to rest in. She is ceremonially placed in this soil, signifying that the earth is our mother, as they say. We come from the earth and we go to the earth.

But then the baby is bathed in oil. This oil is in fact the body fat of the totem animal: the body of the animal has been boiled down until its body fat is liquid and is then used to bath the child all over. Then the baby is lifted into the air: signifying that she may go in all directions, following the four winds, but wherever she goes she always belongs to this place, this land, this country.

Then the baby is washed in water, to remove any evil spirits that may surround her: and thus she is set free to live, in her place, with her people, in her name.

As it is explained to me, this ceremony suggests a life orientation. The child from the outset belongs. Through this ceremony, the person can speak of their place, their people and their name. This is not something they can ever remove or lose, even though they may travel, or be removed from their place and their people. This identity also involves obligations, relationships and expectations, on all sides. Belonging is a way of life: it draws the child into that life, and it gives the child that life.

I would like to suggest to you that Christian baptism is meant to function in this way: far more than the highly individualistic and experiential focus that it has in contemporary practice. It is meant to be the most fundamental expression of our life, our identity, our place in the scheme of things. If there was some way our churches could recover these dimensions of Christian baptism, which I believe are inherently biblical, then the Church would be transformed in the character of its life as a missionary community. I would like therefore to explore the implications of our baptism and some other worship practices, as a basis for understanding Baptist identity.

A Crisis in Baptismal Identity

It seems to me that we have, in many places, a crisis in baptism. Recently I asked a group of students (all active in local church ministry) whether they would see it as a central goal of their ministry to get people to be baptised, and most said 'No', because they found that it was not meaningful to their people. It isn't a meaningful thing to do. What has happened to us that committed Christians, young and old, need to be persuaded that baptism is a meaningful thing for them to do? To begin with, it suggests an individualistic understanding of faith, and baptism. I will be baptised if someone can convince me that it is meaningful or worthwhile for me. Second, it clearly shows that in many churches people come to faith and discipleship without baptism being a part of that: it's a kind of optional add-on. This contrasts starkly with Acts 2.41 where we read that all who welcomed Peter's message were baptised: it was the thing to do, immediately. So, against a background of a widespread loss of the significance of baptism, I want to suggest that our baptismal heritage offers rich resources for understanding the whole of our identity as Christian communities. I want to suggest that our worship, and with it our whole

lives as a communal priesthood offered to God, can be understood through the metaphor of baptismal worship. Baptist communities are called to be immersed, continually, in the life of God and the mission of God's Spirit. This is our reasonable worship (Rom. 12. 1). Our gatherings for worship and our practices in worship give expression, and further stimulus to our individual and collective lives of worship: the collective priestly offering of all the believers. It is into this life that we are baptised. Our baptism is the symbol of this life of immersion in God.

Three Dimensions of Baptismal Practice

As a brief articulation of this perspective, I would like to suggest three dimensions of baptismal practice which also indicate the character of our life together as an immersed community.

First, the Christian believer is baptised into a community of God's people called the Church. The baptismal act immerses us in the life of this people of God and directs us to the life of Christ shared with, among and in this community. The London Confession of 1644 describes this group as "called and separated from the world, by the word and the Spirit of God, to the visible profession of the faith of the Gospel, being baptised into that faith, and joynted to the Lord, and each other, by mutuall agreement, in the practical injoyment of the Ordinances, commanded by Christ their head and King".¹

What we see here is that the community of faith, the Church, is the community which is made alive (regenerated) by Christ, through the Spirit. Sacramentalists, and some streams of baptistic thought, may wish to argue that it is baptism itself which effects this regeneration; others resist this view. Whichever line we take, the point at issue here is that those who have been baptised are now participants in a living body, the body of Christ, who is, in this paragraph, described as the head and king of this body.

So we see another of the central biblical images of the Church here, the body of Christ. Along with it the paragraph also clearly identifies the medium of Christ's reign, the Spirit.

It is on this basis that from the outset Baptists (along with all orthodox Christians) have baptised in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. In this act, we are immersed into the mission of God. Christians are, through baptism, directed to the life of Christ, not only

¹ 'The London Confession, 1644', reproduced in W.L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Revised edition (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1969), Section XXXIII, p. 165.

as an example in the past but, through the Spirit's enabling, a way of living in the present. This is an ontological as well as an ethical claim: the baptised are alive in Christ. The risen Christ lives in them and they live in him. The Anabaptist 'Waterland Confession' sets this out very clearly, identifying the 'internal' spiritual significance of baptism.

The whole action of external, visible baptism places before our eyes, testifies and signifies that Jesus Christ baptizes internally in a laver of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, the penitent and believing man: washing away, through the virtue and merits of his poured out blood, all the spots and sins of the soul and through the virtue and operation of the Holy Spirit, which is true, heavenly, spiritual and living water, [washing away] the internal wickedness of the soul and renders it heavenly, spiritual and living in true righteousness and goodness. Moreover baptism directs us to Christ and his holy office by which in glory he performs that which he places before our eyes, and testifies concerning its consummation in the hearts of believers and admonishes us that we should not cleave to external things, but by holy prayers ascend into heaven and ask from Christ the good indicated in it (baptism): a good which the Lord Jesus graciously concedes and increases in the hearts of those who by true faith become partakers of the sacraments.²

The confession here is that the baptised believers receive from Christ, through the Spirit, a new and spiritual life. We are immersed into the life of God in Christ, to reach out for the things Christ sets before us: true righteousness and goodness. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are presented here as the mediums through which we participate in this divine life, this new creation.

God forgive us for the times we have presented baptism (merely) as a necessary thing so that people can vote at the church meeting! Baptism is nothing less than the effective symbol of our individual and collective, once and continual, immersion in the mission and life of God, laid out before us in Christ as a good news invitation, and made effective in and through us by God's Spirit.

So our baptismal practice, in our heritage, has these three dimensions: we are immersed into the community of God's people; we are immersed into the body of Christ; and we are immersed into the life of the Spirit. These dimensions of baptismal practice (which *are* our ecclesiology)

² W.J. McGlothlin's translation of the 1580 Confession of the 'Waterlanders' is reproduced in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*. The section quoted is Article XXXII. Lumpkin, op cit, pp. 60-61.

suggest that we need to recover a more clearly theological understanding of what is actually happening in baptism. Here I sense that our concern to avoid elements of sacramentalism has robbed us a proper focus on what God is doing in the baptismal drama. We have made it so much something *we* do; and as Western culture has become more and more individualist, people have seen their baptism as something they do, even to the point where individuals arrange their own baptismal services, choosing locations, time and place, guest lists, music and readings, and who is to perform the act. In these situations, baptism has lost its churchly character and become an optional ritual which people may or may not find meaningful. As a consequence, the Church has lost this baptismal sense of its very identity.

A Drama of Three Actors

Christian baptism needs to be seen as a drama of three actors. The main actor in the drama of baptism is God. Baptism is an act of God, who makes real the power of Christ's resurrection in the lives of women and men today.

God the Holy Spirit baptises. We are indeed baptised by the Spirit and in the Spirit: this is not some separate or subsequent event, this is the very meaning of baptism. It may be possible to distinguish what the Pentecostals call water-baptism from spirit-baptism, but this separation is not supported by the scripture: it makes water baptism into something too human. Baptism for Jesus is with water and the spirit (John 3.5) or, as we see it in Acts, people are baptised *with* water and immediately receive the Spirit (Acts 2. 38, and many other instances. The story of Simon the silversmith in Acts 8. 9 - 24 is surely presented as the exception which proves the rule).

The God who raised Jesus from the dead, by the agency of the Spirit, is also the one who raises us, through baptism, and makes the resurrection a reality in our being.

Secondly, there comes an individual, who makes the response of repentance, a genuine turning to God in response to the good news of resurrection reality.

This is a response of faith, which shows itself as trust, hope and obedience. Faith is not exhausted by the idea of believing; indeed it is so much more that believing may well be a minor part of it: it is much more a response of trusting and doing. The response of faith is a life, not just an intellectual assent. In any event, though, baptism is a response to the

message and reality of God's redemptive work in Christ, reaching individuals in the here and now with the reality of Christ's living presence. The response of faith is the individual's positive engagement with that reality.

And then, thirdly, there is the community: people are not baptised by ministers, they are baptised by the community of faith, by the Church. The congregation does not witness a baptism, as a spectator event: the congregation is active in the whole drama, bringing that person to baptism, sharing the faith-commitment, itself affirming what they affirm and receiving what they receive, and celebrating their new birth, and in so doing the community receives this new member and commits itself to their care and nurture. This is a very active role. The community involved in baptism is indeed one of the gifts of God to every new Christian, a family of faith in which to grow.³

All this suggests to me that baptism is a performative act. It effects orientation to the life of God. Just as Jesus in his own baptism was nourished by the Spirit as God's chosen and beloved, and directed with overtones of the Servant figure in Isaiah towards his mission of service and suffering, so too our baptism identifies us with God and gathers us into God's continuing mission in this world.⁴

One way in which Baptists have tried to express these implications of baptism, at times in our history, has been through the laying on of hands. Biblically, the laying on of hands is associated with calling and commissioning. Amongst early Baptist communities, there was an interesting dispute about this practice. It is worth considering for a few moments.

The Laying on of Hands

In the 17th century, there was a lively debate and, in fact, a quite intense division amongst British Baptists about the practice of laying hands upon all those who were baptised. Barrie White's study, *The English Baptists of*

³ The argument sketched here has been published in my essay entitled, 'Future Church - a Crisis in Baptism?', in Ken Manley (ed), *Future Church: A Baptist Discussion* (Hawthorn, Victoria: Baptist Union of Victoria, 1996), pp. 81-91.

⁴ Here it is worth noting that Jesus is the chosen one, affirmed as such in the baptismal narratives. So, too, 1 Peter 2. 8 speaks of Christians as a chosen people. This element is not considered in our later discussion of a holy nation and royal priesthood, but would need to be considered in a more comprehensive study. The difficulties of the exclusive and possible supercessionist implications of this idea need to be addressed. In the context of the baptismal narratives, the stress of the expression seems to be more on the situation of the chosen one as beloved, nourished and held precious to God, rather than any implications of preference over or exclusion of others.

the 17th Century has a detailed section about this controversy and some of the attempts to heal the divisions within and between particular congregations over this matter, and a useful discussion of some of the issues involved.⁵

It is to be remembered that John Smyth had referred to this act in association with ordination of church officers. The laying on of hands was intended to identify the officer, in a time of prayer, designating that person as a leader, but it was also done to assure that person that God gives to them the power to serve in this ministry.⁶ The act was both identifying and empowering.

General Baptists became particularly interested in the implications of Hebrews 6.1-8, which they saw as indicating six principles of the Christian's life. These words follow on from chapter 5, where we read of the concern that the Christians receive a good foundation in faith. The writer regrets that they still need milk rather than solid food, but urges them in Chapter 6 to hold onto the sure foundation, because (it suggests) once this is lost it is impossible to restore. Here then are the six principles: repentance from dead works, faith towards God, the doctrine of baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

The General Baptists differed from the Particular Baptists only in the fourth, the laying on of hands. Some Particular Baptists did this, while almost all General Baptists did. Laying hands on the baptised is specified in the 'Orthodox Creed' of the General Baptists of 1679. In 1674, Thomas Grantham wrote about this principle, arguing that in not laying on hands in this way the churches were neglecting "the Sealing Spirit of Promise".⁷ As Barrie White observes, General Baptists saw the imposition of hands as an act which confirmed both the believer and the church's commitment to obedience to Christ and the pattern for the church which they saw laid down in Hebrews 6. To commit themselves fully to this way was also to draw upon the Spirit's presence, so they argued that not to lay hands in this way was to deny themselves some measure of the Spirit's presence and

⁵ B.R. White, *The English Baptists of the Seventeenth Century*, Second edition (*A History of the English Baptists, Volume 1*, General Editor, Roger Hayden) (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1996), pp. 38-40.

⁶ W. T. Whitley, *The Works of John Smyth*, Vol. 11, p. 388, cited in A.C. Underwood, *A History of the English Baptists* (London: Kingsgate Press, 1947), p. 36.

⁷ Thomas Grantham, *The Fourth Principle of Christ's Doctrine Vindicated*, quoted in Underwood, *op cit*, p. 123.

power. This explanation is supported by William Rider's tract, 'Laying on of hands asserted' (1656).⁸

While I cannot here pursue the course of this controversy, in which incidentally the Particular position (opposing the laying on of hands on all the baptised) seems to have won out, I think it is worth asking what really was at stake. It is not clear to me that it is simply about a second element in the process of becoming a church member, as H. Leon McBeth suggests, though it is something like that.⁹

The laying on of hands, at the time of baptism, was seen to invoke the Spirit and thus to express the seal of the new covenant upon the new believer. It did not mean that those whose hands touched the person in some literal sense mediated the Spirit. Only God gives the Spirit: the Spirit moves where it wills, not where we say it will. But at least one of the issues here was whether the seal of the Spirit was for all those called to faith in Christ, as witnessed in Baptism. On this both Particular and General Baptists were agreed. While the Particular Baptists reserved the laying on of hands for the ordination of ministers, this did not imply that only these people received the Spirit.

So what did this sign mean? Here I run the risk of over-interpreting events and movements of the distant past and attributing theological meanings which may not have been there. Nonetheless, I think we can infer some things from the significance given to this practice. To say that the Spirit is given to the newly baptised is to say that they now live in God and are gifted and called for this life. It is also to say that each member of the community can look to this person as an expression of God's presence amongst us. It is to say that this person has some gift from God, for us – which we must receive, value and use. And it is to say that this person also has a responsibility to contribute their gift to the life of our community. In short, what is signified here is a notion of how the Spirit gives life to the whole church. Each person is gifted, in some way, and they are invited and given scope to speak in the meetings because they have been baptised into Christ and have, as Hebrews 6 puts it, received a sure foundation and a taste of the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come.

⁸ For a discussion of how this controversy was played out, and eventually faded out, in the subsequent century, see Raymond Brown, *The English Baptists of the 18th Century (A History of the English Baptists, Volume 1*, General Editor, B.R. White) (London: The Baptist Historical Society, 1986) pp. 44-48.

⁹ H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), p. 195.

Much earlier, General Baptists had been ridiculed because their preachers were not educated types: in 1645 a tract had criticised Baptist preachers such as ‘an honest glover ... a reverend Taylor (tailor?) ... a learned scholler ... a renowned cobbler ... a button-maker, and divers others’.¹⁰ In 1647, Edmund Chillenden issued a paper, ‘Preaching without Ordination; or a Treatise proving the lawfulness of all Persons to preach and set forth the Gospell, though no minister, nor any other Officer in the Church of God.’¹¹

What these things signify, I suggest, is that General Baptists saw the gifts of God’s word coming to them through many lives and many people, and it was for this reason that their meetings invited more than one speaker and left open the opportunity for others to respond. The laying on of hands signified this radical openness to God’s gift in and through each other and a continuing expectation that the gifts of the Word and the “powers of the age to come” really were with them.

An interesting historical and theological question is why the Particular Baptists opposed this practice (remembering that initially not all rejected it, but by and large it was strongly opposed). The Particularist position seems to have been focussed on the office of the Messenger or Teaching Elder, who was to be called by the local congregation to this ministry and ordained by the laying on of hands. Though some groups denied this, most held that this ordination and laying on of hands was, as the Particular Baptists of 1704 said, “an ordinance of Jesus Christ still in force”.¹² So, whereas the Particular position did not deny the right of all to speak in the meetings, nor the gift of the Spirit to all, they reserved the laying on of hands for the recognition and edification of those specifically called to the ministry of teaching and preaching. By 1693 the Western Association, meeting in Bristol, affirmed that the Lord’s Supper and Baptism should be administered by an ordained elder, but they allowed (recognising that they must not limit the Holy One) that this might be done by one who was called by the congregation but had not yet been ordained by the laying on of hands.

¹⁰ This section is quoted by Underwood, from Louise F. Brown, *The Political Activities of the Baptists and the Fifth Monarchy Men in England During the Interregnum* (Washington, 1912), p. 5, n7. Underwood, op cit, p. 86.

¹¹ Underwood, op cit, p. 75.

¹² Underwood, op cit, p. 131.

Critical Issues Arising

So what do we make of all this? In many places, until recent times, Baptists have not laid hands on the newly baptised. It is interesting to note, however, that the practice has been re-introduced in a wide variety of contexts, perhaps as the influence of Pentecostal movements has come into Baptist churches.¹³ In my own local church, hands are laid upon people leaving the church to go to another place, usually as a sign of commissioning and blessing. I think a case can be made for the re-introduction of the practice at baptism. I am not sure that we would continue to exegete Hebrews 6 as offering us six principles of Christian faith, in the way the early Baptists did; nor perhaps would we see this as an issue of sufficient worth to cause dividing from our fellow-Baptists. But there is surely something of great importance in this historic practice. We are baptised into the missionary life of God in the real world, here and now. We are invited to have a part in the mission of the Spirit, and this part is mediated to, and through, each believer. We are each given a gift, for the whole mission of the Church. And we are, each of us, a gift to and for the whole mission of the Church. This is 'laid upon us' and for this we are accountable.

In passing, it is worth noting an interesting personal anecdote concerning the laying on of hands, which illustrates the unhappy separation of baptism and the reception of the Spirit from the corporate life of the Church. In April 1890, as a young man of 19 years, the celebrated F. W. Boreham was baptised at the 'Old Baptist Union Church' in Stockwell. This took place without him being a participant in the life of that church, or at that stage any Baptist church. The pastor urged him to receive the Holy Spirit as hands were laid upon him. Boreham records in his autobiography: "it really did seem to me that a gracious tide of spiritual power poured itself into my soul, and, for weeks afterwards, I lived in such ecstasy that I could scarcely believe that the earth on which I was walking was the dusty old earth to which I had always been accustomed." (By the time Boreham went to Spurgeon's College the following year, he was a member of the Kenyon Baptist Church.)¹⁴

There are some critical issues here, though, for Baptist identity and witness today. One of these is the question of why this discussion of all the

¹³ Anthony Cross makes this observation also, in *Baptism and the Baptists: Theology and practice in twentieth century Britain*, (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000), p. 405. Cross observes that the laying on of hands in one situation was explained as "the recognition of the seal of the Spirit and commissioning for work in the priesthood of all believers".

¹⁴ F. W. Boreham, *My Pilgrimage: An autobiography* (London: Epworth Press, 1940), p. 88.

baptised as equipped for ministry in and with the Spirit was so quickly limited to the question of teaching and preaching in the context of the gathered church. This is the question of the equipment of all the saints for the work of ministry not only in the gathered life of the community but in all the expressions of Christian life, in citizenship, in home and family, in working life and in neighbourhood. Today, we see our lives as expressed in many different areas. We even call them different lives: we say, 'my work life' or 'my home life', and (sadly) 'my spiritual life', as if each of these is a life apart from the others.

The theology of baptism and the early idea of laying on of hands, suggested above, call for an understanding of our life and identity as Christians to be worked out in all aspects: in work and home, in citizenship and sporting clubs, and in the gathered life of the church. All these should be one, integrated and holistic expression of our baptism – our immersion in the life of God, the creator and living Lord of all the world.

Another critical issue here concerns *whose* hands might be laid upon the newly baptised. In the context of ordinations, in other traditions, the idea of apostolic succession fairly clearly defines whose hands are laid. Those who ordain are those already ordained. In the early Baptist ordination of deacons and pastors, the hands were those of the elders and, commonly, pastors visiting from neighbouring congregations. There seem to be some vestiges here of the older ideas of office and apostolic succession. If today we wished to restore the practice of laying hands on all the baptised, to express the inclusion, gifting and responsibility of all in the mission of God, it is a vital question whose hands would represent the whole community in this act.

One interesting question is whether today we have any other expressions, in our worship, of these theological dimensions of our identity and mission. It might be suggested that the practice called 'the right hand of fellowship', extended to new members when they are 'received' into membership, is the successor to the laying on of hands. This would continue the view that the laying on of hands was part of the process of becoming a member, in which perhaps the members of the church affirm (by a second act) what has been done by God in the first act. I suspect in fact that this has been the trend, implying that being baptised involves a person's relationship with God, while joining the church involves their relationship with other Christians. All too easily, this has made joining the church optional. To say this, however, implies that the church is not involved in the act of baptism. Furthermore, it ignores the clear association of the act of laying on of hands with the invocation and mediation of the

Spirit. On the positive side, the right hand of fellowship expresses trust and encouragement to new members, recognising them as gifts to the local church and assuring them of the continuing support and prayer of their fellow members. It is worth noting that many churches now also pass the peace, an act in which people shake hands to express that collective fellowship in Christ. So this act can be seen as a continuous affirmation of the symbolic meaning of the right hand of fellowship first extended upon baptism and entry into membership.

It seems to me that the most important question to consider here is how the gathered life of the church, including and most importantly the worship service, acts of baptism and the laying on of hands, gives expression to the priesthood of all believers. This idea is perhaps the most misunderstood of all in our heritage, especially where it is taken to mean, as one commentator put it a generation ago, “getting the laity to help the clergy with their work”.

Beginning with an outright refusal of the distinction between clergy and lay, I would suggest that we need to re-think the idea of the priesthood of all believers in such a way as to recognise, with the earliest Baptists, that all Christians are called into ministry, each of us and all of us, as one life together in and with God. This is not a priesthood of each Christian, but of all. There is one, collective priesthood in which we each have a contribution.¹⁵

Secondly, I think it vital to say that the priesthood of all believers does not mean that anyone can do anything, in the ministry of the church, totally, nor specifically in the gathered activities such as worship. The priesthood of all believers does not mean that everyone is gifted for everything; nor that some are gifted for everything (despite their messianic pretensions). Rather it means that all are gifted, and that together there is a ministry which is offered to God as an expression of our life in Christ, our one great high priest. We are together called to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation” (I Peter 2. 9).

Thirdly, in explaining what this means for Baptist life, I find it helpful to distinguish the gathered life and the dispersed life of the local congregation. The gathered life of the church includes all its organisational expressions, the groups and meetings and missions and machinations, while

¹⁵ A strong biblical argument for the priesthood of the whole church is presented by John A. T. Robinson in *On Being the Church in the World*, Chapter Four, ‘The Priesthood of the Church’ (London: SCM Press, 1960). There is a helpful Baptist discussion of this idea in Nathan Nettleton’s unpublished Masters thesis, *The Liturgical Expression of Baptist Identity*, Chapter 11 (Melbourne College of Divinity, 2001).

the dispersed life includes all that the people do and are, at home and work, at leisure and in the wider community.

I want also to argue very firmly for the importance of the dispersed life as the primary context for ministry and worship. The priesthood of all believers is about offering the whole of our lives, and our whole life as a people of God, as worship.

In terms of the worship of the gathered community, however, the priesthood of all believers, understood in this way, is quite crucial. It is not about who can do what. Rather, it is about whose life is mentioned and challenged and prayed for and offered in worship.

Just as we asked the critical question, “Whose hands?”, in the laying on of hands, or the right hand of fellowship, so too it is a critical question whether the worship service is in fact the gathering of the whole lives of all the people. If we see our whole lives as immersed in the mission and life of God, then the worship service must be a gathering and naming of that whole life, individually and collectively, in prayers of thanksgiving and of supplication. Our preaching and praying will be acts of discernment and expectation: seeking where God is and what God is doing, and pleading God’s blessing for those we know who are in need, in prison, in suffering and confusion, or praising God with those who are enjoying health and success in their endeavours. In such worship there must be prophetic challenge and positive inspiration, and a sending of all in the assurance that we do not take Christ into the world, rather we meet him, we go with him, alive in the Spirit. In short, if our lives are shaped by our baptism, if we are immersed continually in the life of God, then the worship service will be the gathering and the focussing of who we are, in all aspects: it will be the offering of all that we are, to the glory of God.

Dr Frank D Rees is Professor of Systematic Theology and Dean of Whitley College, the Baptist College of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

Longing for a Better World: Towards a Critical Approach in Adult Christian Education

Introduction

Christian education in the Church, including adult Christian education, has a tendency to reinforce historically developed understandings of the Bible, Christian doctrine, and the Christian way of living. While the majority of these are still relevant and acceptable, there are views and values that do not fit into the contemporary world for several reasons. In the case of adult education in the Church, the discrepancy between what is taught and what 'works' grows larger as adults compare their life experiences and theory with each other.

Though there are several attempts to move toward dialogical methods in church adult education, the majority of teaching is designed to reproduce the 'good old' ways of thinking, valuing and acting, and often done in a monologist way. This may be called the 'socialisation' model, where both the curriculum and the 'right' outcome of learning are usually decided beforehand.

Several historically developed traditional understandings of Christianity may not be appropriate for the following reasons:

First, the **changing context of societies is creating different questions and using different language than church-based education.** In the religiously and culturally diverse global village where we live, many traditional understandings are coming under question. People who live amidst the growing role of media and information technology, pluralistic values and multi-religious communities¹, have become suspicious about universally understood metanarratives, Christianity included. Even more, many people do not speak or even understand the language of Christianity any more.

Secondly, **changes in context result in changes in thinking.** In the postmodern, "one is always questioning the discourse within which one is located".² Edwards and Usher continue: "The decline of the power and plausibility of metanarratives and the greater significance accorded

¹ J. Dettoni, J. Wilhoit, (Eds.) Introduction, *Nurture that is Christian* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002, 3rd Ed).

² R. Edwards, R. Usher, University adult education in the postmodern moment: trends and challenges. *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol 47, Number 3,4, 1997, p. 166.

localized and particularized knowledges require skills of working with difference and desire in a variety of sites and modes of provision with a diversity of learners.”³ Therefore, new ways of thinking require new ways of teaching, which welcome diversity and difference and are not acting from the imagined power-position.

Thirdly, **the ‘knowledge transmission’ or ‘banking’ model of education does not always lead to learning.** According to cognitive learning theories, learning takes place by the active engagement of the mind in processing data, the instruments of perception, the emergence of insights and the development of memory.⁴ Tynjälä⁵ derives two main prerequisites from her research to successful learning: teaching has to support the learner’s construction of knowledge, and in social interaction learners come to better learning results. Therefore, the transmission model is giving way to the transformation model.⁶

Furthermore, Freire connects this way of teaching with the ideology of oppression. He writes: “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as process of inquiry.”⁷ Even though this comparison might be slightly exaggerated, it is true to a certain extent.

Fourthly, **adults are described as self-directed and experience-bound learners, whose orientation to learn is problem- or task-centred.**⁸ They want to explore questions which are real and important to them and want to decide the direction of their actions for themselves. Often the questions which church adult education is answering are not the questions of actual adult learners. As long as there is no agreement between questions and answers, there will be little change for the better. Only if adult learning in the church correlates with the changes of society, and its broader context, can we expect transformation, both for the learners and society.

³ Edwards, Usher, *ibid.*, p. 166.

⁴ A. Rogers, *Teaching Adults* (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2002).

⁵ P. Tynjälä, Konstruktivistisen ja perinteisen oppimisympäristön vertailu yliopistossa. *Aikuiskasvatus* No. 3, 1999, pp. 259-260.

⁶ W. Wardekker, S. Miedema, Identity, Cultural Change, and Religious Education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 23:2, pp. 76-87.

⁷ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1981), p. 58.

⁸ M.S. Knowles, Contributions of Malcolm Knowles, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Adult Education*, K.O. Gangel, J.C. Wilhoit (Eds.) (SP Publications Inc: Victor Books, 1993), p. 97.

Therefore, the current article argues that to get the best results both for the Church and in the wider world, church adult education has to involve deep dialogue between the Christian message and all of its participants, with an understanding of what has developed through history. Through this conversation, sharing and evaluation of material taught in the light of the life experience of the participants in their context, the Christian message can emerge afresh and meaningful to the present generation of adult learners, both not-yet-believers and church members. But how do we achieve this?

One possible way to answer these challenges is to turn to the critical approach. Brookfield writes about adult education, “Within major adult education research journals and at major research conferences, critical theory and postmodernism are influential theoretical resources.”⁹ The critical approach, which finds its starting point in the Frankfurt school of thought, has continued and developed in postmodern thought.

Blake and Masschelein describe critical theory as:

1. A critical stance toward society in its actual and developing forms;
2. Informed by a strong ethical concern for the individual;
3. A rejection of all possible excuses for hunger, domination, humiliation, or injustice; and
4. A longing for a better world.¹⁰

Thus, the emphasis is not on socialisation, but in critical evaluation of society and emancipative processes. Nesbit writes, “For many, the debate over the primary purpose of adult education can be reduced to a simple choice between emancipation and socialization.”¹¹ Because of suspicion toward ‘big narratives’ and growing pluralism and diversity, emancipative-critical approaches have started to prevail over socialisation approaches.

Critical theory has strongly influenced educational philosophy, both generally and specifically in the two areas of education which are important to the thinking of Christian adult education: adult education and religious education. Both fields have several influential critical theories.

⁹ S. Brookfield, Overcoming alienation as the practice of Adult Education: the contribution of Erich Fromm to a critical theory of adult learning and education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol, 52, No.2, 2002.

¹⁰ N. Blake, J. Masschelein, Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy, *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education*, N. Blake, P. Smyers, R. Smith, P. Standish, (Eds.) (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), p. 39.

¹¹ T. Nesbit, Mapping Adult Education, *Educational Theory*, Vol 49, No 2, 1999, p. 272.

Probably the most influential theorist during the last decade has been Jack Mezirow. His transformative theory of learning has several connecting points with the Christian message and learning goals. He is strongly influenced by Freire and Habermas.

Freire, being influenced by Marxist ideas like the Frankfurt school of thought, has also influenced critical approaches in religious education. Though coming from slightly different perspectives, the writings of Groome, Hull, Erricker and Wright share the same interest in answering the challenges of the changed context.

Though different in their emphasis, critical theories in both adult and religious education share one common goal – to free people from patronising and unquestioned attitudes of societies (both secular and religious), to help them think independently and, in so doing, to transform their societies into better places in which to live.

What is the role of a critical approach in adult Christian education?

The question is explored by first describing the historical background to a critical approach. Then two branches of critical learning theories – one in general adult education and the other in religious education – are described. On the basis of these theories, three key concepts are identified in the critical approach to Christian adult education. The conclusion shows how this approach can answer the limitations of the socialisation approach to learning and the challenges of the contemporary world.

I Two influences of critical approaches in learning

Critical theories of learning have two, partly overlapping sources: critical theory and its ‘younger brother’, continental postmodernity.

Critical Theory, created in the Frankfurt school of thought, was developed by authors like Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer, Fromm and Pollock. The Frankfurt school of thought originated in the late 1920s in Frankfurt. These authors were influenced by Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Therefore, the main idea of critical theory is liberation from ‘false consciousness’.

However, many of the early representatives manifested themselves almost exclusively in a negative way. Blake even calls it a “form of utopian

pessimism”.¹² A different, and one of the most developed and positively effective theories of the Frankfurt school of thought, is by Jürgen Habermas. His approach is called the socio-critical theory, in which he attempted to reinstate the original emancipatory programme of Critical Theory. I will turn to him later.

Other influences to critical learning theories come from the ideas of postmodernity, especially from those called continental postmodernists by Oden - Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault.¹³

Lyotard wrote about “incredulity toward metanarratives”, created as a reaction to Habermas’ – one of the later representatives of the Frankfurt school – ‘legitimation crisis’.¹⁴ Lyotard claimed that the death of metanarratives is itself liberation.

Derrida adopted the idea of ‘deconstruction’ which meant that just as the meaning of a text is dependent on the reader, so also reality can be ‘read’ differently depending on the perspectives of the ‘knowing selves’ that encounter it.¹⁵ All that emerges in the knowing process is the perspective of the ‘self’ who interprets reality.

Foucault added that every interpretation is put forward by those in power. He went even further, claiming that because ‘knowledge’ is always the result of the use of power, to name something is to exercise power and hence to do violence to what is named.¹⁶

Critical Theory, and, likewise, postmodern thought, “has actually impugned the modernist ideal of authenticity and questioned the limits of autonomy”.¹⁷

Mark Driscoll describes central questions of postmodernity which have been, in one way or another, part of different critical learning approaches:

- What is truth?
- How do we come to know truth?
- How do we interpret texts?
- How do we look at power?

¹² Blake, Masschelein, *ibid.*, p. 39.

¹³ T.C. Oden, *Agenda for Theology: Recovering Christian Roots* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979).

¹⁴ R.A. Mohler, Jr., *The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm, The Challenge of Postmodernity*, D.S. Dockery (Ed.) (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), p. 72.

¹⁵ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976).

¹⁶ M. Foucault, *Truth and Power. Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, C. Gordon, (Ed.) (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

¹⁷ Blake, Masschelein, *ibid.*, p. 45.

- How do we look at religion?
- How do we look at community?¹⁸

To summarise, critical theory of learning involves analysis of a person's 'conscience' and its influences, issues of power, and liberation 'of false consciousness'. It has taken different forms in the writings of different authors, but these key issues have stayed the same. A critical approach in both adult learning and in Christian education will now be described.

II Critical approaches in adult and religious education

A critical approach in adult education

In adult education, critical theories have some 'brothers' with whom they share common interests: a radical adult education approach¹⁹ and a social-political change model.²⁰ However, these approaches are more concentrated in the issues of social justice, while a critical approach in adult education deals with questions of knowledge and power in the learning situation. Rogers writes: "When applied to education and training, critical theory concentrates on the power relationships within every learning context.... Learning is thus circumscribed by the socio-cultural context within which it takes place."²¹

Jack Mezirow is the best known author with his Transformation Theory of learning. Yet, he does not start from an empty place. His two main influences come from the writings of Freire and Habermas.

Paulo Freire shares interests of liberational and critical approaches. His understanding is influenced by a radical Marxist perspective, a catholic theology – especially the writings of Pope John XXIII – a philosophical liberal perspective and some elements of existentialism.²²

Freire claimed that education cannot be neutral: it either domesticates or it liberates learners. Freire²³ identified three stages of learning:

¹⁸ Cited in S. Rabey, *In Search of Authentic Faith* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001), p. 36.

¹⁹ D. Deshler, *Radical Adult Education and the Politics of Power. Adult Education and Theological Interpretation*. P. Jarvis, N. Walters, (Eds.) (Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1993), also described in John Elias, *The Foundations and Practice of Adult Religious Education* (Florida: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Co., 1982).

²⁰ N. Thompson, *Adult Religious Life and Nurture. Changing patterns of Religious Education*. M.J. Taylor (Ed.) (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), pp. 266-273.

²¹ Rogers, *ibid.*, p. 104.

²² P. Jarvis (Ed.), *The Development of Adult Education Knowledge. Twentieth Century Thinkers in Adult Education* (London & New York: Routledge, 1987).

²³ P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

1. Task-related activities;
2. Activities concerned with personal relationships;
3. 'Conscientization' – a concept that leads to action to transform the lifeworld.

He believed that learning is only learning when it leads to action.

It is not difficult to see Freire's influence in Habermas' three fundamental areas of cognitive interest which he defined at 1978 in his book, *Knowledge and human interests*.²⁴ For him, cognitive interests were the unifying basis between theory and praxis.²⁵ These are:

1. Instrumental or technical knowledge, which means knowing how to manipulate the environment.
2. Communicative or hermeneutical knowledge, which refers to understanding in the realm of interpersonal relations, which increases social and cultural understanding. Further, instrumental knowledge, as the lowest form, needs communicative or hermeneutical knowledge, which is derived from analysis and understanding of cultural meanings in order to prevent abuse of the environment.
3. Emancipatory knowing, which means self-understanding, awareness and the transformation of cultural and personal presuppositions that are always with us and affect the way we act.

In brief, for Habermas all three forms of cognitive interest, and likewise learning, have their role in the life of human beings and society. However, emancipatory knowledge is valued as the highest and is set as the goal, *telos*, of human life, implicit in the very necessity, structure, and ethics of communicative action itself, and thus of course a universal norm. Moreover, he saw human life as a quest for self-emancipation, a striving toward autonomy through self-formative processes.²⁶

One thing what makes Habermas' commitment to emancipation positive "and seems to save it from the impotence of relativism, is his insistence on the salience of dialogue in any critical exercise".²⁷ Habermas, without being an adult educationalist, has influenced contemporary adult education theory mostly through the writings of Jack Mezirow.

²⁴ J. Habermas, *Knowledge and human interests* (London: Heinemann, 2nd Edn., 1989).

²⁵ T. Groome, Shared Christian praxis: a possible theory/method of religious education. *Critical perspectives on Christian Education*. J. Astley, L. Francis (Eds.) (Leominster: Gracewing Fowler Wright, 1994), p. 221.

²⁶ Rogers, *ibid.*, p. 98.

²⁷ Blake, Masschelein, *ibid.*, p. 46.

Mezirow²⁸, one of the most influential adult education theorists, adapts the first two of Habermas' cognitive interests or ways of learning. Yet, he does not consider the third, emancipatory learning, as a separate style. Rather, for him, the transformation process pertains in both instrumental and communicative learning domains. Moreover, for Mezirow, most learning involves both instrumental and communicative learning.

Habermas has also been criticised by Brookfield.²⁹ He accuses Habermas of moving back and forth between neo-Marxist and pragmatic perspectives. He writes: "It is liberalism, not socialism".³⁰

Mezirow, being influenced by both Freire and Habermas, has created the theory of transformative learning. He writes: "Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true and justified to guide action."³¹

He suggested, that by learning in childhood we lay down socially and individually constructed meanings, find the keys, make sense of experience, form perspectives. Further, in learning as adults, we continue reconstructing and transforming these meanings through challenging our assumptions – our frames of reference – in the course of active interaction with our environment. Thus, we also evaluate what we have uncritically assimilated from others – to gain greater control over our lives. Mezirow calls it reflective discourse and adds that this, together with transformative learning, requires emotional maturity – awareness, empathy, and control – which Coleman calls 'emotional intelligence'.³²

Marxist criterion of liberation from 'false consciousness' means, for Mezirow, that "we be aware of how we come to our knowledge and as we can be about the values that lead us to our perspectives".³³ If we think about knowledge in Foucaultian terms as a form of power, we may also say that distancing from 'taken-for-granted' meanings, we gain more freedom; in the terms of Habermas: we are part of the process of emancipation.

²⁸ J. Mezirow, Learning to Think Like an Adult. J. Mezirow & Ass. (eds.), *Learning as Transformation* (pp. 3-32) (Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Company, 2000) p. 10.

²⁹ S. Brookfield, Repositioning Ideology Critique in a Critical Theory of Adult Learning. *Adult Education Quarterly*, Vol. 52, 2001.

³⁰ Brookfield, *ibid.*, p. 8.

³¹ Mezirow, *ibid.*, p. 8.

³² Mezirow, *ibid.*

³³ Mezirow, *ibid.*, p. 8.

A critical approach in religious education

Let us now turn to a critical approach in religious education. Critical views have been represented in the writings of church-based religious educationalists such as Thomas Groome, as well as writers concentrating on teaching religious education in school, such as Hull, Erricker and Wright.

Jeff Astley claims that the church as a whole “desperately needs more critical education”.³⁴ However, Astley continues, a critical viewpoint is not neutral, but happens on the basis of certain principles and presuppositions. Let us look for two possible criteria in evaluating critical Christian education.

The first criterion offered as a basis for critical analysis is *rationality*. According to this criterion, Melchert has set three goals for Christian education:

1. ‘Increase openness’ in her learners (to the Christian heritage, to non-Christians, to “affirmation and criticism of the Church and Christianity”);
2. Help them connect life, faith and the gospel, and resist a fragmented mentality;
3. Be sensitive to doubt and criticism.³⁵

While being helpful, rational criterion raises a question: is Christianity and Christian learning only about thinking? Isn’t a religious dimension much broader than a system of rationally proved beliefs?

Another criterion, offered by Freire, is a *liberating and humanist attitude*. Freire’s third type of learning³⁶, ‘conscientisation’, refers to reflection of the learners’ practice and experience and ‘demythologising’ or ‘decoding’ of the ‘false consciousness’ what leads to oppressive societies. Both of these criteria seem to be suitable and important principles for a critical approach to Christian religious education.

Freire’s approach is developed further in the works of Thomas Groome. He is also influenced by Aristotle, Marx, Habermas and the Frankfurt school.³⁷ In analysing different expressions of praxis theory

³⁴ J. Astley, *The Philosophy of Christian Religious Education* (Alabama: Religious Education Press, 1994), p. 87.

³⁵ C. Melchert, ‘What is the educational ministry of the church?’, *Religious Education* 73:4, 1978, pp. 435-436.

³⁶ Freire, *ibid.*

³⁷ Groome, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 215.

(feminist theology, third world theology, black and minority theology etc.), he is critical of them for having too narrow a concept.

Astley and Francis conclude his view: “shared Christian praxis involves

- critical reflection on present action
- together with dialogue/encounter between individuals
- who share their reflections and visions with one another.”³⁸

Critical reflection is “an evaluative analysis of something, in and of itself, that attempts to unmask the assumptions of social conditioning”.³⁹ However, social conditioning cannot be unmasked unless it is done in a broader social context. The way of knowing that Groome calls for should “hold past, present and future in a fruitful tension, that fosters free and freeing lived Christian faith, that promotes a creative relationship with a Christian community and of that community with the world”.⁴⁰

Dialogue and sharing are not important only as methods. As the content of the learning is shared Christian praxis, Groome believes that to be Christian, educating always requires a Christian community. But Groome does not believe in a simple sharing of opinions in the present time. His understanding of ‘shared praxis’ also involves the story – the memory of God’s revelation in the past – and the vision of the Kingdom of God in the future.

Astley believes, that “formative education itself can also function as a sort of theological/ethical critical education, by forming people in a particular position (with a particular set of attitudes, beliefs and valuations) which is the base for their critical thinking ... about the received Christian tradition and their own (Christian) position.”⁴¹

Turning to the writers of critical religious education in schools we must start with the ideas of John Hull. His views are quite liberal. Hull is speaking of ‘critical openness’ as a type of ‘thinking for yourself’. He distinguishes Christian nurture from secular education, instruction and indoctrination. Hull shares deconstructionist ideas, saying that “there is no fixed and final form of Christian faith, and this is why there can be no fixed and final form of nurture into it”. For Hull, to be open means: “to listen, to

³⁸ Groome, 1994, *ibid.*, p. 215.

³⁹ T. Groome, *Christian Religious Education* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publ., 1980), p. 277.

⁴⁰ Groome, 1980, p. 149.

⁴¹ Astley, *ibid.*, p. 93.

be ready to receive other persons, to hear new ideas, to re-examine one's own past".⁴²

In recent years, two interesting authors have emerged: Erricker and Wright.

Erricker is one of the apologists of the Constructivist Model of Teaching and learning in Religious Education. This very immanent model calls "pupils to communicate their experiences, to share the meanings that they have given to them, and to reflect upon those meanings...".⁴³ He applies the ideas of Foucault, accusing Religious Education as functioning to attempt to maintain a sense of traditional values in society.⁴⁴ He thinks the reason why education is not dealing with development at an epistemological and hermeneutical level is that this might awake a radical, critical, and experiential interest that would be difficult to contain and direct.⁴⁵

In Erricker's approach we can recognise postmodern influences like switching from metanarratives to small narratives, Foucaultian concerns about power that is mediated through knowledge and Derrida's influence in the idea of 'deconstruction'.⁴⁶ Moreover, we see influences of critical theory in his approach of concentrating on the experience of children and liberating them from the 'false consciousness' of traditional values.

Andrew Wright, author and apologetic of Critical Pedagogy⁴⁷ of Religious Education, is critical of Erricker's way of 'inducting children into a single, non-negotiable postmodern world-view', constructing a metanarrative of absolute freedom and reducing the important hermeneutical relationship between the interpreter and the object of interpretation into self-understanding of the interpreter.⁴⁸

Wright offers a critical spiritual educational approach as an alternative to both Erricker's postmodern relativism and his liberal, modernity-based experiential-expressive model of religion, which is based on twin principles of freedom of belief and tolerance. Both models share

⁴² J. Hull, et al. Critical openness in Christian Nurture. *Critical Perspectives on Christian Education*, ibid., p. 253.

⁴³ M. Grimmitt, The captivity and liberation of Religious Education and the meaning and significance of pedagogy. M. Grimmitt (Ed.) *Pedagogies of Religious Education* (Great Wakering, Essex: McGrimmons), p. 44-55.

⁴⁴ C. Erricker, Shall we Dance? Authority, representation, and voice: the place of spirituality in Religious Education. *Religious Education*, Vol 96, No 1, 2001, p. 20-35.

⁴⁵ Erricker, ibid., p. 34.

⁴⁶ A. Wright, Dancing in the Fire: A Deconstruction of Clive Erricker's Postmodern Spiritual Pedagogy. *Religious Education*, Vol 96, No 1, 2001, p. 120.

⁴⁷ A. Wright, *Pedagogies of RE*, ibid., p. 170.

⁴⁸ Wright, 2001.

the view that religious dogma is situated in the private sphere and in internal religious experience.

Wright believes that we do need critical pedagogy, particularly a critical realist approach, in the midst of cultural diversity and religious pluralism. However, he also believes in divine revelation as the basis of Trinitarian spirituality. He is postmodern in his belief in the role of the local community because, for him, public worship is the place where divine and immanent realms meet.

He defines spirituality as “.... the developing relationship of the individual within community and tradition, to that which is – or is perceived to be – of ultimate concern, ultimate value and ultimate truth”.⁴⁹ Furthermore, a critical spiritual education looks for meaningful integrity between the person’s developing experiences and the authority of the order-of-things that is accessible to them.

Wright (2000) suggests three steps or spirals of learning inside the approach. These are: the horizon of the pupil, the horizon of religion and the engagement of horizons. The first phase calls pupils to explore, articulate and justify their initial beliefs. In the second spiral pupils are asked to explore different, preferably conflicting religious and secular perspectives and locate their positions within this spectrum. The third spiral focuses on the cultivation of the skills needed to engage in a reasonable and responsible conversation.

One of the prerequisites, according to Wright, is to develop spiritual literacy, what enables pupils to engage in spiritual questions in an informed, sensitive and intelligent manner. One side of this literacy is “equipping pupils to recognise and respond appropriately to power structures inherent in religious and educational discourse”.⁵⁰

Wright is realistic in the sense that “Education is inevitably a political affair”,⁵¹ and thus cannot be unideological. Therefore, the best teachers can do is equip children to be wise and prepare them to recognise and analyse different influences and create their own world-view as a response to it.

The weakness of Wright’s critical theory lies in the fact that usually pupils develop critical and analytical skills at the onset of adolescence. Does that mean we should not teach religion before then, or deal only with

⁴⁹ A. Wright, *Spiritual Pedagogy. A Survey, Critique and Reconstruction of Contemporary Spiritual Education in England and Wales* (Abingdon: Culham College Institute, 1998), p. 88.

⁵⁰ Wright, 2000, p. 178.

⁵¹ Wright, 2001, p. 128.

the horizons of the pupils? However, in the case of adults, a critical spiritual education approach is worthy of consideration.

His contribution is important in recognising the need of spiritual literacy. In the post-Christian, formerly atheistic and more-and-more multireligious cultures, spiritual literacy becomes increasingly important, involving not only personal relationships but also, perhaps, becoming one of the bases of democracy.

Reflecting on Wright's approach with two influential forces of critical theory of learning, we may recognise both the influence of a Marxist 'liberationist' approach and postmodern understanding of the death of metanarratives and the Foucaultian concern about indoctrination of pupils into certain ideological world-views. However, Wright's view differs from both branches regarding power. Being a realist and not believing in the possibility of power-free structures, Wright calls for a recognition of ideologies and learning skills which recognise the misuse of power.

Conclusion of theories

Critical theories in both adult and religious education thus share common influences: the Frankfurt school of thought and its Critical Theory and postmodern writers like Derrida, Lyotard and Foucault. While the authors' influences are similar, they have come to different conclusions:

1. Freire calls for 'conscientized' transformation of praxis, the lifeworld. He calls for 'demythologizing' the 'false consciousness' which leads to oppressive societies.
2. Habermas valued emancipatory 'knowing' higher than instrumental and communicative 'knowing', believing that we, as learners, should reach awareness and the transformation of cultural and personal presuppositions.
3. Mezirow calls for transformative learning. For him, this means transforming the taken-for-granted frames of reference to a more truthful and justified guide of action.
4. In religious education, Groome calls for a critical reflection of present action, through the process of dialogue about 'story' and 'vision' between individuals, in the context of Christian community.
5. Hull is quite liberal in his views, believing that as there is no fixed and final form of Christian faith, we should engage in listening to each other and re-examining our own past.

6. Erricker is fighting against the opposed values of traditional society and for children's rights to create their own world-views.

7. Wright, one of the authors of critical spiritual education, is representing a critical realist model and believes that truth and understanding evolves "in the relationship between knower and the known".⁵² He emphasises the development of rational abilities and skills as a way of recognising the misuse of power to find a critically reflective and justified world-view. He also advocates spiritual literacy in that we should know, not only our own traditions, but those of others, including secular ones.

As we see from the previous overview of opinions, secular adult education theorists have come to different conclusions from those of writers of religious education. While adult educationalists stress the value of emancipation of the individual and transformation of both people and societies, religious education theorists, Groome and Wright, recognise the importance of community in the process of learning. Even though the relationship between the role of the community and the individual voice within it is not clear, communication and dialogue within the community certainly have an important role.

These critical theories, coming both from general adult education and religious education, give important guidelines for the critical approach in church adult education. Elias adds the qualities which are essential for political adult education: rationality, understanding, examination of evidence, openness to differing viewpoints, and the patient search for the truth.⁵³ These are also important for a critical approach.

III A critical approach in Christian adult education

On the basis of critical theories in both general adult education and religious education, we may describe three key concepts for a critical approach in Christian adult education:

1. Reflective analysis of ways of thinking and acting;
2. The role of dialogue;
3. Emancipative and transformative processes.

Each key concept and its role in Christian adult education is now described; then the question of why this kind of approach is needed.

⁵² R.K. Martin, Having faith in our faith in God: Toward a critical realist epistemology for Christian Education. *Religious Education*, Vol. 96, No. 2, 2001, p. 245-261.

⁵³ J. Elias, *ibid.*, p. 58.

Finally, we should ask, is there something which we cannot deconstruct without losing our Christian identity?

Adult learning in church has the enormous potential of changing the church and helping it develop. The more churches use democratic processes and involve lay people in their ministry, the bigger the role of adult education will be.

1. *Reflective analysis of ways of thinking and acting*

Christine Eaton calls critical-analytical reflection one of three ‘colours’ of adult Bible study. Alongside methods of disciplined imagination and action through ritual and ministry, she believes that adults can be taught to ask some basic analytical questions and to use some of the scholar’s tools. She writes: “The goal of critical reflection is to move beyond knowledge to understanding and finally wisdom... This reflection can foster significant personal transformation.”⁵⁴

There are many areas where Christian adult education can help people grow and develop through reflective analysis; the following are just some examples.

Finding the core message of the Bible as a basis of our Christian acting

Reflection on thinking and acting are interconnected. However, if we want to understand the ways of acting, we should look behind the actions and ask the reason for these. Often we follow odd traditions, no longer remembering why we pursue them, but which make us act in certain ways. In these cases, we need to deconstruct our theology and Christian way of living from the supplements which have been added by historic influences. Jesus gave us an example through the Gospels, trying to free the laws from additions which the Pharisees had given to the Law of Moses. Similarly, we should look for the core message of the Bible.

Deconstructing Hellenistic and other ancient influences

In the process of finding the core message of the Bible, several authors have tried to deconstruct Hellenistic influences. Probably one of the most interesting issues discussed is the Hellenistic priority of the soul over the body and its influence on the whole Christian history of thinking and acting (i.e. Murphy⁵⁵). Another interesting question would be the role of women in church communities (though this question has a much broader

⁵⁴ C.E. Blair, *The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults* (Louisville: Geneva Press, 2001), p. 92.

⁵⁵ N. Murphy, *Theology in the Postmodern Age*. (Prague: IBTS Occasional Publications, 2003).

background than just Hellenistic influences). These are two of many other issues still waiting for reflection and discussion.

Applying the Foucaultian idea of knowledge as a result of power, it might be helpful to ask whose additions to the core message of the Bible we have accepted, since it would be naive to believe that even democratically constructed churches are free from the influence of power. This is especially visible in fundamentalist circles.

Unmasking the assumptions of social conditioning

Another way is to look at how political circumstances have influenced both the theology and practice of the Church. As Groome says, in doing that we attempt “to unmask the assumptions of social conditioning”. It is interesting to see how different understandings are represented in the teachings of the churches which have long suffered under Soviet atheistic pressure compared to those who have experienced freedom and even governmental support in so-called Christian countries. The former have created survival methods, sometimes called ‘deep-frozen Christianity’. One of its characteristics is clinging to old ways of doing things as a form of identity.

Deconstructing modernist influences

One of the most powerful influences on Christian theology over recent centuries has grown out of the Enlightenment and modernist ways of thinking. Grenz⁵⁶ calls us to a critical opposition towards modernist individualism, rationalism and emphasis on outward progress. He draws the parameters of postmodern theology through the following key-words: post-individual, post-rational and focused on spirituality.

Post-individualism means being actively part of certain communities as a context for identity formation. Post-rationalism involves taking care of ‘holistic personalities’, not just the soul. It also means moving beyond words – using affective-emotional and bodily-sensual alongside the rational-verbal. Probably the Reformation denial of the role of visual images in the Church has to be deconstructed too. Spirituality reminds us of the role of the heart along with the role of the head. Correct actions have to grow out of inner resources and motivations.

These are just some examples of possible areas where we need to get rid of ‘false consciousness’ or at least put it in balance. What we can never

⁵⁶ S. Grenz, Star Trek and The Next Generation. *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, D. Dockery (Ed.) (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).

lose or deconstruct is the core message of the Bible. Without it, Christian adult education ceases to be Christian.

During this reflection process, one thing may appear very difficult – religious understandings are very resistant to change. Hull⁵⁷ explains it through the logic, that superordinate constructs are more resistant to change than are subordinate constructs, while religious constructs are normally superordinate. The reflection process may create intellectual conflicts and result in a resistance to learning, often in the form of withdrawal. Rogers⁵⁸ suggests that we should not set authority against authority. Instead, learning is supported more when factual information and the biblical basis for ‘new’ approaches are presented along with discussion.

2. The role of dialogue

As reflection and analysis are more or less subjective processes, it is important to listen to different voices. This calls for dialogue in Christian adult learning. Also, dialogue diminishes (though never excludes) the possibility of misusing power in an authoritarian way, which Freire called ‘the pedagogy of oppression’.

Conversely, Habermas presupposes that “the consensus on which authority is founded can arise and develop *free from force*. The experience of distorted communication contradicts the presupposition.”⁵⁹ This is especially true with adult learners.

However, learning in church is so often a one-sided monologue. As well as individual Christians, entire churches feel frightened when different ideas, often in the minutiae, are exposed. Probably one reason is that the core message of the Bible is not clear; therefore, people fear that small detailed changes corrupt the whole message.

Taking part in the communicative process, which Habermas calls communicative learning, requires that learners are capable of reflective activities, thus fulfilling the first criteria of a critical approach in Christian adult learning. As true communication often involves shared feelings, intentions, values and moral issues, it requires that learners assess the meaning behind the words. That is, they must become critically reflective of the assumptions of the person communicating. Communicative competence refers to the ability of the learner to negotiate his or her own

⁵⁷ Hull, J. What prevents Christian Adults from Learning? (SCM Press Ltd., 1985), p.109.

⁵⁸ Rogers, *ibid.*

⁵⁹ J. Habermas, The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality, cited in A. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), p. 382.

purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than simply acting on those of others.⁶⁰

Gadamer, Habermas' conversion partner, agrees that dialogue is important for human knowledge. For him, truth emerges in a process that is dialogical rather than methodical. While method is monological and tries to control the subject matter, in the dialogical approach the inquirer allows him/herself to be questioned or provoked by the subject matter.⁶¹

If we accept the importance of dialogue, the next question that arises is, who are the dialogue partners and what are the requirements for dialogue?

First, according to the advice of Groome, members of the Christian community have to share their understanding of story (the past) and vision (the future of the Kingdom of God) in a reflective way. In educational praxis, it means more group-based learning activities, which make communicative learning possible.

Secondly, the church and Christian adult education are situated in mostly secular and often multireligious societies. As well as self-knowledge, preparedness for dialogue requires at least some knowledge of non-Christians and their views.

Wright suggests that we teach children 'spiritual literacy' – helping them verbalise their own world-views and learn of others' often confusing and contradictory religious and philosophical horizons. Wright believes also that knowledge helps us resist authoritative power structures.

Certainly, adult learners and believers need this 'spiritual literacy' just as much. Probably, the time has come to introduce other religious views and practices as part of a Christian adult education programme. Sometimes it has been done in the form of 'know your enemy'. However, this is not the right attitude to hold between Christians and people outside the Christian faith.

It would be more helpful to evaluate the pros and cons of certain religious views in their context, alongside reflection on the critique, addressed to Christianity itself. This may be done, for example, in being positively sensitive to criticism in movies like, for example, 'Dogma', 'The Body' and 'Life of Brian'.

In the process of dialogue between different partners we cannot deny the importance of the Christian community as the context in which our own

⁶⁰ Mezirow, *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶¹ H-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975).

religious identity has been formed and developed. Individual Christians without a believing community will, sooner or later, be adrift in the sea of postmodernity without a map and compass. Even though the community's importance is non-negotiable, Christian adult education is the place where the question 'what kind of believing community?' may be asked and discussed.

The role of dialogue in Christian adult education cannot be over-emphasised. In the case of Christian education, it is not only dialogue between learners, but also 'story' and 'vision', Christian message and Christian community. However, discussion cannot be the end in itself; it needs a higher goal.

3. *Emancipative and transformative processes*

Just as teenagers question the values and teachings of parents, individual Christian believers cannot become 'adult believers' without finding their own religious identity through questioning the identity of the religious community. James Fowler⁶² has described it as a switch between Synthetic-Conventional and Individuative-Reflective faith. We may call this the process of emancipation.

As the chasm between the Christian Church and the secular or multireligious world grows deeper, the need to create a coherent picture of being part of both realities becomes stronger. Thus, emancipation in the context of Christian adult education means creating a coherent and meaningful identity of the person. Melchert⁶³ has set one of the goals for Christian education as helping learners to connect life, faith and the gospel, and resist a fragmented mentality.

However, moving further from the safe identity of the believing community requires courage because we would be putting our current understandings at risk; doing that, we would both find ourselves and lose ourselves.

In Mezirow's terms, all learning is emancipatory. It teaches us to think, reflect and analyse. Even more, it shows us the richness of opinions and the 'contextual colours' of different identities. According to Habermas, communicative interaction has an important role to play in the process of emancipation. This is understood as open and undistorted linguistic

⁶² J. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (Harper San Francisco: Harper and Collins, 1981).

⁶³ C. Melchert, What is the educational ministry of the church?, *Religious Education*, 73:4, 1978, pp. 435-436.

interaction in human affairs. Habermas contrasted it with the ‘strategic’ discourse of dominant social forces. He was interested in maximum communicative rationality, which entails, for him, the liberalisation of interaction and the radicalisation of argument in open and unconstrained intellectual discourse.⁶⁴

For Christian adult education it means that people have to be given space and time to explore their questions without being threatened as heretics. As far as possible, an authentically honest climate should be provided. Stave Rabey⁶⁵ is convinced that people don’t want either easy answers or teachings in the style of ‘five steps to something’ (often given in the form of two steps: pray and read the Bible more). Life is too complicated for that. Instead, they want to think and explore the deep meanings of life itself.

Donald Posterski says: “We need to become Christian meaning-makers. Meaning-makers are people who make sense of life, people who make sense of God, people whose lives ring with clarity in the midst of contemporary ambiguity, people who have integrity...”⁶⁶

Still, Christian adult learning emancipation, though in itself important, cannot be the final goal as Habermas describes it. Emancipation is the prerequisite for transformative processes. If our identity is identical with the identity of the community we belong to, we can never transform it. Just as we cannot transform communities without taking part in them. But this is true not only of transforming religious communities. By creating holistic identity through the process of emancipation, the Christian adult learner may explore ways of transforming the different communities of which they are a part.

In the words of Mezirow, the goal of transformation is “to become more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective, so that we may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true and justified to guide action”.⁶⁷

We may paraphrase this to describe the goal of transformation in Christian adult education: “to become more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective, so that we may share Christian beliefs and meaningful opinions that will make this world a better place to live in”.

⁶⁴ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984).

⁶⁵ S. Rabey, *ibid.*

⁶⁶ D. Posterski, *Reinventing Evangelism* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1994), p. 122.

⁶⁷ Mezirow, 2000, p. 8.

Conclusion

Finally, let us explore how a critical approach in Christian adult education can overcome the limitations of a socialisation approach and answer the challenges of our contemporary world: suspicion of traditional understandings, diversity of opinions and learners, inadequacy of a 'knowledge transmission approach' in learning and the need to deal with real questions.

Reflective analysis of ways of thinking and acting helps adult learners to identify the core of their Christian belief and the message of the Bible. By this process, they rethink the reasons for being a Christian believer. This strengthens their personal Christian identity and separates it from culturally, historically or philosophically added influences which do not support their beliefs and are sometimes out-of-date. Making clear the core Christian message enables adults from different denominations and even different religions to be better conversation partners. This strengthens ecumenical dialogue and cooperation.

A dialogical learning process diminishes the danger of misusing power (sometimes linked to financial power), a sin into which the church has fallen several times in its history. Adult learners feel themselves more meaningfully connected with the Christian community when their voice is heard and their questions considered.

Conversation with non-Christians in a reflective manner helps us to see what is common to all humans and what might be the right ways of doing mission. A lack of listening in this process has caused the churches to engage in an enormous amount of ineffective and culturally irrelevant evangelisation activities. While many people live with a spiritual hunger, the churches become more and more empty because of a lack of 'dialogue'. In the dialogue with secular partners Christians have a lot to learn. At the same time the value of Christian community and its core beliefs are clarified.

Emancipation is often the result of both knowing the Christian community background where the primary religious identity is formed and testing it in relation to other communities and identities. Integrated identity is a sign of maturity and emancipation in the best Christian sense. People with a holistic mentality do not hide inside the walls of the church.

Mature adult learners who are interested in the core message of the Bible and the understandings of other people, both inside and outside the

church, gradually draw a picture of the real needs of this world and how the Christian Church can transform the world into a better place to live. And as they care and want to learn more, they will actually be involved in changing the world.

To conclude, a critical approach to Christian adult education does not, in itself, have any independent value; the hidden value is in the good it might generate: a meaningful faith, cooperation between churches, dialogue between people, and the responsibility of all Christian people to make this world a better place in which to live.

Einike Pilli is a doctoral student in theology at the University of Tartu, Estonia, and lecturer of education in Applied Theology at IBTS, Prague.

Pursuing ‘glory and goodness’

Through my involvement as an adjunct lecturer at IBTS, I have found myself lovingly inducted into the Anabaptist heritage which is being interpreted and revised for today amongst European Baptists and, as if by a process of osmosis, introduced to the theological methodologies of the late John Howard Yoder and James Wm McClendon Jr. This paper represents something of a tribute to that process. More particularly, it is part of an ongoing struggle to work through the implications of 2 Peter 1.3:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.

It is the unraveling and probing into the methodological implications of this foundational ‘glory and goodness’ that we here address.

I would want to preface this study with three convictions that affect the approach I take:

- a. As the pastor of a local Baptist church, I try to function as a baptistic theologian, without attempting to be an academic theologian;
- b. Many of my colleagues in pastoral ministry are deeply suspicious of the motives and message of those who either teach or engage in academic theology;
- c. For the baptistic theologian it is axiomatic that Christian theology, properly understood, will always lead the theologian and his collaborators deeper into the life of Christ, at both a personal and collective level.

Prolegomena

“The Father gives to the Son; and the Son communicates to the Holy Spirit..... The Father through the Son, with the Holy Spirit, confers all His gifts; the gifts of the Father are none other than those of the Son and those of the Holy Spirit. For there is one salvation, one power, one faith; one God the Father; one Lord, his only begotten Son; one Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. It is enough to know these things; do not be curious about the Spirit’s nature or *hypostasis*.... it is enough for salvation to know that there is a Father, a Son and a Spirit.”¹

¹ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures*, 16.24.

“Grace is but glory begun, and glory is but grace perfected” (Jonathan Edwards).²

A biblical beginning

As the Johannine witness so clearly testifies, it is when grace and truth are together expounded into humanity that we fully meet with God:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1.14,17)

This paper proceeds on the premise that ‘grace and truth’ can, in the sense conveyed above, be taken as representative of these two counterpoints of ‘glory and goodness’. Let us risk more. Let us go further and say that the proper *modus operandi* of this God of grace and truth is God himself in action, through his Holy Spirit, and not some subsidiary agent. God communicates his Spirit to us and thereby communicates himself, bringing us into consubstantial union with him: we meet with the Holy Spirit by his immediate, ontic actuality and presence coming to confront us in our substantial humanity. Israel was called to be the dwelling place of God’s glory. God’s glory is to be found here, in the midst of his people (Exodus 29.42-46). Grace is glory presently being realised into our lives, founded in the manifestation of the Spirit’s ontic actuality: God’s own, self validating presence with us.³

What, then, of goodness? Goodness in itself describes the essential nature of God himself, truth predicated by the presence of God’s glory. The goodness of God is expressed in the Word become flesh, Jesus Christ. Goodness is the entirely legitimate, cataphatic descriptor of God: goodness is the self-declared, self revealed nature of God, who proclaims himself to be

The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to

² F. Frangipane, *In the Presence of God* (Cedar Rapids: New Wine Press, 1994), p. 3.

³ Readers will detect here an appeal for a fresh redevelopment of methodologies that refocus on the Economic Trinity (as in pre-Nicene thought, focusing on God as he meets with us in his economy of salvation). The recent focus in academic theology has been upon the Social or Immanent Trinity (that model developed in post-Nicene thought, examining the inner relations of God’s Being to Himself). For forceful advocacy of the Immanent Trinitarian model and introduction to the issues involved, see Colin Gunton, *The Christian Faith* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 176ff. For a wider application of the Immanent model to the challenges of post modernity, see Grenz & Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin (Exodus 34.6-7a).⁴

So let us attempt to define, once more, glory and goodness. We might describe glory as the proper realisation, in human experience, of the ontic actualisation of God: *from* the Father and *by* the Holy Spirit. Following Cyril⁵ and the catholic witness of the early Fathers, we affirm that there is no knowledge of God, no true theology engaged, without our realising this participation in God. To know God's glory is to participate in God. The actualiser of this participation is the Holy Spirit.

The next question must therefore be, "how can we come to a place where we can participate in God's glory, in this way?" The answer again lies in the simplicity of the primitive, economic Trinitarian confession: it is *through* the Son. It is *through* the Son at the only place we are capable of meeting him: the Son, *ensarkos*. Our humanity must be offered up *through* that reconciliation afforded us *through* Jesus Christ's atoning mission (2 Corinthians 5.21), our humanity voluntarily surrendered by us to our Father *through* Christ Jesus at the very place where God fully embraces us in our sin, at the place of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (Romans 6.4; Galatians 2.20). It is thus *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit that we are brought into that fully, Hebraic, holistic knowing of God.⁶

God's goodness is therefore, from this primitive Trinitarian perspective, predicated by and established as a necessary adjunct to God's glory. Goodness comes with glory in the same way that we, who are created as *imago Dei*, possess the faculty of mental and intellectual process,

⁴ The whole narrative which describes Moses' quest to see and know more and more of God's glory is a metaphorical description which cries out for further exploration and development, beyond the scope of this short paper. Suffice to note that herein lies our biblical base for exploring the relationship which exists between our meeting with the Being of God and the rational explication of that meeting: the epistemic descriptor of God's glory. For the moment let us simply note that this descriptor is in transitive terms. Our God 'describes himself' in terms that predicate and require an object for the economy of his self revelation towards us. This, of course, is an aspect of an ongoing hermeneutical and dogmatic debate opened up by Clark Pinnock's, *The Openness of God*.

⁵ Cyril is chosen as a point of reference because this quotation illustrates the frustration felt by churchmen, even in the time around Nicea, of the developing complexity and abstraction that was arising in debate over the Immanent relations of God.

⁶ The formulation in Athanasius, that God meets with us *from* the Father, *through* the Son and *by* the Holy Spirit, is seen by some as representing the high point of patristic, Trinitarian quest. Ontologically, the Son Incarnate is for Athanasius the *locus operandi* of the Trinity's self-revelation to man, through His salvific economy: "If then for our sake he sanctifies himself, and does this when he is become man, it is very plain that the Spirit's descent on him in the Jordan was a descent upon us, because of his bearing our body. And it did not take place for promotion to the Word, but again for our sanctification, that we might share his anointing..... For when the Lord, as man, was washed in the Jordan, it was we who were washed in him and by him. And when he received the Spirit, we it was who by him were made recipients of it." [*Against the Arians* 1.47, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol.4, 2nd series, Schaff & Wace (Editors)].

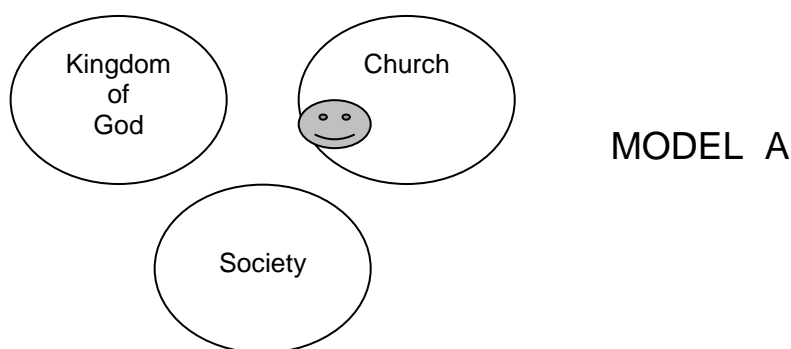
predicated for us as sentient beings. As those made in God's image, we acknowledge that rational process is an essential aspect of our life. So we might say that, as with mankind, mind is to being; so with God, goodness is to glory. The Holy Spirit not only brings us to receive the ontic actualisation of God through presenting us with God's glory, but serves in this adjunct way as an epistemic agent, manifesting to us God's goodness. The Holy Spirit both presents us with the glory of God, anchored in and through Christ; but also teaches us of God's goodness, found in Christ, in a manner in which we can rationally absorb and appreciate⁷.

Let us summarise our opening premise, then. It is when we are led by the Spirit in the totality of his ontic actualisation towards us, including his work as an epistemic agent, that we are truly brought into the grace and truth that are fully manifest in the Word become flesh in Jesus Christ (John 1.17), the glory and goodness of God made known to us.

Keeping the ball in play

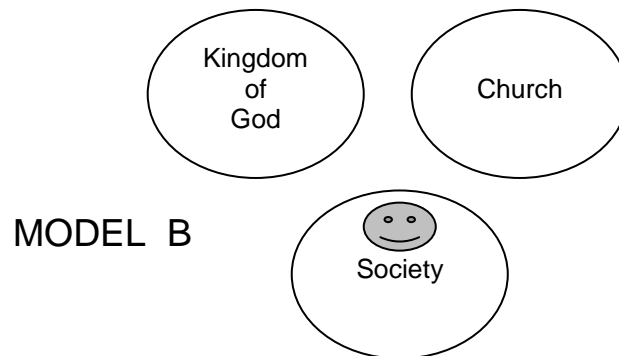
There is a desperate need to preserve this perspective when we come to pursue theology.

From which perspective should we seek to engage in theology? Should we try to stand, gauging our perspective from the position of being principally rooted in the church or in society at large? That is, should we try and see things from this perspective:



⁷ In this paper we restrict ourselves to addressing the epistemic agency of the Spirit in terms of his aiding us to explicate and rationally analyse truth and grasp the meaning of God's goodness. There are, of course, wider applications. The Spirit's epistemic agency also enables us to explore, redefine and restructure our understanding of all aspects of that cohesive reformation of the structure of worship that comes about through our being transformed to conform the more closely to the incarnate Logos. For an introduction to missiological implications, see Samuel Escobar, *A Time for Mission*, (Leicester: IVP, 2003), pp. 112ff.

or from this one?



How should we respond, as aspiring or practising baptistic theologians? Perhaps the first step is to remind ourselves of the nature of the theological task we are engaged in. At the outset I asked you to allow me to affirm that Christian theology, properly understood, will always lead the theologian and his collaborators deeper into the life of Christ. This is founded for us in the Petrine affirmation:

His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.⁸

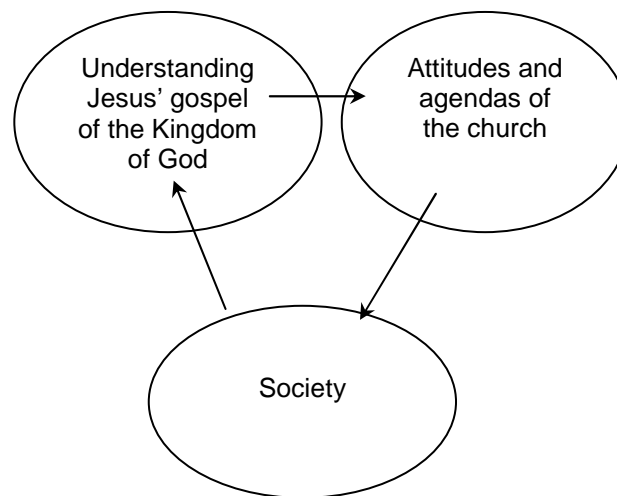
This is surely the proper basis on which we come to engage in the theological task. A knowledge of both the glory and the goodness are indispensable in coming to the task of growing in the knowledge of the God who reveals himself to us, in his glory and goodness, by the ontic actualisation and the epistemic agency of the Holy Spirit. More than that, we might go on to say that the knowledge of God that comes to us through the Spirit's epistemic agency is contingent on the counterpoint of God's prior resolution, in his grace, to come among us in his glory: for grace is but glory begun, and glory is but grace perfected.

Our contention is that we need both glory and goodness to be recognised as separate yet integrally related indicators of God's presence and revelation to us. We therefore need to distinguish between the Spirit's holistic activity as the one who bears the ontic actualisation of God's presence and power and his work as an epistemic agent.

Let us attempt to present this diagrammatically. We distinguish these two aspects of the Spirit's activity, in bearing the glory and goodness of God to us, in the following illustration, using models that we shall refer to as the ontic model and the epistemic model. We will deal with the epistemic model first.

⁸ 2 Peter 1.3-4.

The epistemic model



As we earlier noted, mankind is possessed of both a mental and intellectual process. Let us call this an 'epistemic process'. Mankind, whether in Christ or not, can surely reflect on the nature of society, the Church and the Kingdom of God. He can, has had and will have the capacity to make enquiry of all things in his environment and even to speculate on the nature of things outwith that environment. The epistemic process of man, however, is not necessarily predicated by the gracious activity of the Holy Spirit as he would now seek to deal with us, *from* the Father, *through* the Son, *ensarkos*, and *by* the Holy Spirit. When that knowledge that is born of the Spirit within the economy of God's salvation comes to us, the line of penetrative revelation is always *from* God, *through* the Church, *into* society at large. The knowledge that is born of revelation is always unidirectional, from God to us. The indicator of this, from our perspective, is that we find ourselves responding to the Father, *by* the Spirit, *through* the Son. As Cyril affirms

The Father gives to the Son; and the Son communicates to the Holy Spirit..... The Father through the Son, with the Holy Spirit, confers all His gifts; the gifts of the Father are none other than those of the Son and those of the Holy Spirit.⁹

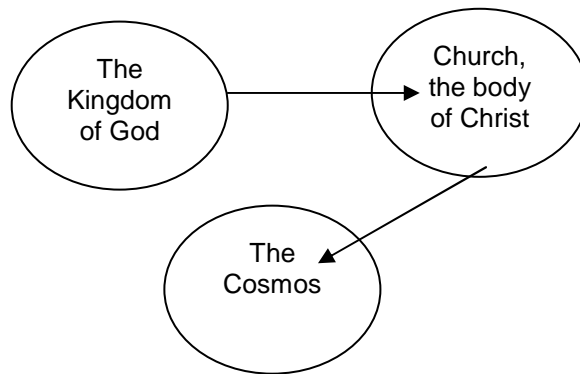
A true response to revelation that is from the Spirit will always cause us to look to the Son and to where he is accessible to us: in and through the humanity of Christ and those whose humanity has been surrendered in baptism to Christ, in his Church.

Certainly, the social environment we find ourselves within can significantly affect both our understanding of the Gospel and also our

⁹ *supra*.

attitudes and agendas within the Church. But what man calls knowledge is not what God recognises as knowledge. Why not? Because the knowledge of God in his goodness must always find its counterpoint in the knowledge of God that comes in his glory. This epistemic model must be held together with the ontic model.

The ontic model



Our knowing of God, however, is not simply a matter of epistemology. The ensuing task of the theologian is to lead us deeper into Christ, preserving and pursuing the vital link between ‘glory and goodness’.

Increasingly, today, and most certainly in my Scottish church environment, a growing proportion of Christians have been affected by charismatic and neopentecostal influences, as well as through the heritage of Holiness and Pentecostal movements. Intuitive knowledge of God, together with songs and sermons that talk of feeling the presence and direction of God, is ‘an assumed’ for many Christians. It is surely time to give clear and unequivocal theological cognisance to this, and to deliberately and clearly offer theological articulation to it. Strategically, we must pursue this through holding together our understanding of the glory and goodness of God. Presenting a well articulated theology of both experience and knowledge of God will doubtless help people understand and articulate the participation of their lives in and with God. This is earthed in the redemptive activity of God. It comes to us in and through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, dealing with us in Jesus’ name.

Moreover, whether or not we grasp the relationship of glory and goodness, or grace and truth, will decisively affect our theological methodology and hermeneutics: the way in which we will pursue and come to apprehend and express the knowledge of God. We desperately need to self-consciously develop methodologies and hermeneutical principles that

take adequate cognisance of the fact that God comes to us by his glory as well as in his goodness.

A place for apologetics ?

We do not change God in or through what we do. The redemptive process is unidirectional, coming from God, through the body of Christ, into the world by the Holy Spirit.

So it is that both ontic actualisation and epistemic engagement with God are actions of God's self-revelation, whereby he visits us in his glory and also engages us in a realisation of the truth that comes in and through his Word: his Word made flesh, in and through Jesus Christ. Is there a place for dialogue between church and society? Most certainly, the Church must listen to society. It must hear when society explains why the Gospel seems irrelevant. Often, it is because the Church is unchristlike or spiritually impotent! But surely we cannot expect a post Christendom, secular society to fathom the mysteries of God's grace and goodness. The Church must not look to society to give it meaning and purpose. Surely we can grasp that it is more important to search after the illumination of the Father's heart by the Spirit than to listen to the pleas of a disappointed Herod or a disillusioned Judas.

Mankind, including those lauded and applauded for their academic prowess, willingly compliant to the seductive sirens of contemporary culture and held in a vortex of demonised darkness, will doubtlessly seek to engage in ontological experimentation and epistemic speculation. But this can never be properly described as theology, as the Christian understands it. It is a product of the Fall, where we place ourselves in the position of being adjudicators of the truth. It is this which makes us pursue with curiosity the ways of Molech, the Baals and the Asheroth; that leads to endless speculation and relativisation. Here, the self-revelation of God is no longer sacred. All is open to investigation and reduction before the throne of man.

Visiting the methodology of James Wm McClendon Jr

McClendon argues that the Church needs to find a relevance to society through recognising the convictions that are shared¹⁰ in common with that

¹⁰ For McClendon, theology is properly "The discovery, understanding and transformation of the convictional community, including the discovery and critical revision of their relation to one another and

society: for the Church lives in a world where it shares more convictions than it might care to admit with the wider culture. There is nothing essentially wrong with this. I share, for example, with many visitors to Prague, the conviction that travel by airplane, the use of computers and the processing of trees into paper is valid, or else I would not have presented this paper! What we have to ensure is that the convictions that are found in the Church are also infused both with the ontic actuality and the epistemic activity of the Holy Spirit. There is certainly a note that we must sound in common with society; but there is also another, deeper and more sonorous note that must sound within the Church through the presence of the goodness and glory of God. A symphony of sound must arise from among us that resounds not only with the convictional chorus of society, but which finds expression in a fuller, doxological symphony resounding with the purposeful presence and agenda of the Kingdom of God, through the presence of the glory and goodness of God.¹¹

In dialogue with the society it finds itself contextualised within, the local church must discover its convictions; but in addition, these have to be seasoned and purified by the agenda and attitudes of Christ Jesus, founded on the presence of his glory and goodness, transforming the mind and the mission of the Church.¹²

Investment

Where and in what ways am I investing myself? The answer to this question is, I would suggest, the real key to meaningful hermeneutics. Faith is a response to the revelation of what we find in Christ, by our investment of ourselves into the 'who' and the 'what' of God.¹³ It is about seeking to know the heart of God in Christ and to know our own hearts in Christ's: to recognise, embrace and give expression to the glory and the goodness of God. This is not simply an epistemic issue; it is also an ontological one.

To understand an issue or matter epistemically does not mean we have found the hermeneutical key. Epistemic awareness is only part of the picture. There needs also to be ontic actualisation. There has to be an investment of all that we are in God, both in our mind and in our intuitive

to whatever else there is." James Wm. McClendon Jr, *Systematic Theology Vol. 1 – Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1986), p. 23.

¹¹ A masterly exploration of this in the area of ethics, further developing implications in the methodology of both McClendon and Yoder, is to be found in the work of ethicists G.H. Stassen and D.P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics* (InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹² The seminal work on this missional aspect of God's holistic participation with us, in and through the *Missio Dei*, remains David Bosch's, *Transforming Mission* (Orbis Books, 1991).

¹³ The pursuit of both orthodoxy and orthopraxis.

and spiritual being. All that we are, in the creativity of our intellect and emotions, has to be given up to God. What matters is our surrender of ourselves to Immanuel, God with us, enabling and energising that investment of his Word made flesh, in and through the work of the Holy Spirit.

I am blessed when I talk to intellectually gifted men and women of God, such as those on the directorate at IBTS, who have a passion for the cause of Christ's Kingdom. But this I also know well: when I look into the library of any theological institution, sadly, I find much that entertains or informs only academics addressing other academics, or those who aspire to be or wish they were academics. Yet when I read the work of a man or woman of God, I know I am looking for cognisance and awareness of this glory and goodness. I need to sense it. It needs to be there, that divine *imprimatur* on the theologian's writing that draws us deeper into Christ.

How will it be when people read your work? Will they sense and be drawn into the presence and power of the God of glory and goodness? Will their hearts be stirred as well as their minds informed? Are you seeking to hone the qualities that will birth the priceless epithet, 'Christian theologian'?

As we look to gain more and more men and women of such character, my prayer is that my friends and colleagues in pastoral ministry will once again find an appetite for theology proper, provided by the labours of those who serve the Church as Christian theologians.

The Revd Dr James Purves is minister of Bristo Baptist Church, Edinburgh, Scotland, and an adjunct lecturer at IBTS, Prague.

Unemployment and the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic

One of the most rapidly growing problems that the churches in the Czech Republic will have to tackle is unemployment. While, until quite recently, this issue was rather marginal and did not belong to most churches' agendas, at present it seems that work and its shortage become a real challenge. As I begin to reflect on this problem, several questions come to mind. Is it really the task of the churches to deal with unemployment or should they, rather, confine themselves to the Gospel? Are they well resourced and informed to say and do anything meaningful in the field? Should they only speak or also do something? Can the churches use only Bible-language in an essentially public debate or should they prefer more 'neutral' language?

These are fundamental questions and I will have to look at least some of them even if the objective of my research is more particular, namely an analysis of the ways the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic reflect on and react to unemployment related problems. How and on what grounds does this community respond to a widely acknowledged problem of unemployment? I will try to produce a kind of analysis of both 'words and deeds', hopefully a critical and constructive one.

According to Stephen Pattison, there are three main elements in a theological reflection, or a "critical conversation" to use Pattison's term. The elements are a theologian with his or her own faith presuppositions, a particular contemporary situation, and the Christian tradition.¹ The task of a theologian then is to introduce a dialogue of the three. Behind this model there is a notion of theology as an "active enquiry, not just historical research or intellectual gymnastics".² In my special case the pastoral situation will be delineated by human troubles resulting from the problem of unemployment. Certainly there are some historical, social and economic conditions of the present state and these will be a subject of the first chapter. By the end of the first chapter it should be obvious that unemployment is a serious pastoral problem that requires a proper response of the Christian community. The second chapter, then, will introduce and discuss the theological sources available, primarily the social teaching of the Catholic Church.

¹ S. Pattison, 'Some Straw for Bricks' in J. Woodward and S. Pattison, *Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000) p. 136.

² Ibid., p. 139.

After the first two chapters I will finally be able to analyse in some detail the response of the Czech Catholic Church to unemployment. The first section of the analysis will discuss a representative statement of the Czech Episcopal Conference in the area of social ethics, the social charter *Peace and Good* (2000). The other section will study concrete local initiatives of Christians dealing with the problem of unemployment.

As for my own faith presuppositions, which form the third element in Pattison's theological method, they will step in throughout the work. I have chosen to focus on a Catholic community because that is what I have most experience of. At the same time I perceive theology as an ecumenical discipline and wherever possible I try to invite into discussion other Christian traditions.

I. Unemployment in Contemporary Czech Society

Before 1989, in the context of so-called central planned economy, there was no unemployment, at least officially. As in other socialist countries of the Soviet realm,³ citizens had both a right and a duty to work, and a person could be punished if they stayed away from work. There was central planning of employment and jobs. Trade unions functioned as an instrument of the state for implementation of its policy. Therefore, they were in no way independent and actions such as strikes were unimaginable. Consequently, strong centralisation led to low efficiency and poor productivity. Restrictions in the possibility to privately own and use the means of production resulted in a decrease of motivation and initiative.

Of course, the truth about employment in that time was different. For political reasons many people were not allowed to perform jobs corresponding to their qualifications. Some had difficulty in finding work at all. Employers refused to accept politically uncomfortable individuals and they were forced to do the least attractive jobs such as street and window cleaning.

The political and economic transformation that began in 1990 brought the phenomenon of unemployment. Although an active policy of employment was one of the four pillars of social reform proposed by the government in 1990,⁴ pressures of structural change were inevitable. Thousands of people were sacked from huge heavy industry plants and

³ See for example R.H. Green (ed.), *Labour, Employment and Unemployment: An Ecumenical Reappraisal*. Report of the Meeting of the Advisory Group on Economic Matters in Geneva, Switzerland (Geneva: WCC, 1985), pp. 21-22.

⁴ I. Tomeš, *Sociální politika. Teorie a mezinárodní zkušenost* (Praha: Socioklub, 1996), pp. 186ff.

many coal-mines were closed. Moreover, extensive use of computers and technologies requiring new qualifications ruled out a range of senior and less flexible workers. In spite of this the unemployment figures were not threatening in the first half of the nineties, though there was a political unwillingness to undertake substantial transformative steps, which, admittedly, were not very popular. Towards the end of the nineties the government was forced to take those steps and the spiral of unemployment began to spin.

In April 2003 there was about ten per cent unemployment among the Czech population who were capable of work.⁵ In absolute numbers that is over 514,000 seeking a job. Out of these, 258,000 were women and 219,000 were young people between 20 and 34 years of age. Only some 183,000 received monthly social benefit from the state. The overwhelming fact was that over 191,000 of the unemployed had been without a job for more than twelve months.⁶ The figures represent a significantly negative trend when compared with the nineties; the most affected regions being the northern parts of the country where coal mines and heavy industry plants were situated, with Prague, the capital, and its surroundings obviously being better off.

Unemployment influences individuals strongly and deeply. It touches on one's financial means and, consequently, living standards,⁷ family and other relations, mental harmony, and even health. According to a study of the World Council of Churches, the psychological pressures are great:

Unemployment, especially when prolonged, tends to create in the mind of the unemployed person a sense of uselessness, or even of becoming a nuisance, and to empty his life of any meaning. This situation cannot be met by measures of unemployment assistance, because it is the lack of significant activity which tends to destroy his human self-respect.⁸

These results are further confirmed by research on unemployment in the Czech Republic by Božena Buchtová. She found that the long-term loss of a job was most difficult for 41 to 50 year-olds who had little chance of

⁵ At this point some restrictions concerning the concept of unemployment should be provided. The convention on minimal standards in social welfare (102, 1952) of the International Labour Office suggests the following criteria of unemployment: a) involuntary character (impossibility to gain work), b) capability to work, c) being ready to perform a job, d) active search for a job. In Tomeš, *Sociální politika*, p. 116.

⁶ The source of the data is the official website of the Czech Ministry of Work and Social Affairs: www.mpsv.cz.

⁷ The best essay I know on the economic effect of unemployment is G. Orwell, *Na dně v Paříži a v Londýně* (Brno: Votobia, 1996).

⁸ Green, *Labour, Employment and Unemployment*, p. 12.

finding a new job. As for the factor of sex, it seems that unemployment is less stressful for women than for men because the former tend to withdraw to the area of the family and find some satisfaction there. She ranks among the most vulnerable groups young people up to 30 years of age, older people between 41 and 50 years, women, handicapped people, people without qualification and the gypsy minority.⁹

These bare figures alone suggest that unemployment threatens the human and social integrity of the Czech people. Even more pressing is when we take into account the individual human stories that lie behind them. Inevitably, this reality must be a challenge for the Church.

II. Theology of Work and Social Justice

At the beginning I have to ask an inevitable question. Malcolm Brown puts it very clearly in *Unemployment and the Future of Work*: “Why is ‘work’ any of the churches business? If there was controversy over the report on ‘the family’ (which the Church is expected to have a view on) how much more will the fur fly over work and the economy which is not supposed to lie within the churches’ sphere of authority?”¹⁰ Is it legitimate for the Church to get involved in the area of work and employment? Different Christian traditions give diverse answers.

The classic Lutheran doctrine divides the sacred and the secular realm, the first being the sphere of divine truth, the latter of secular reason. Yet, modern Protestant thinking does not divide ‘the world’ so strictly any more and admits that theology has something to contribute in the secular sphere and vice versa. As for their treatment of issues of social justice, which includes work, the majority of Protestants “seek to root their thinking in scripture and, particularly among liberals and charismatics, on experience of the justice of God”.¹¹ Protestant accounts of social justice are hardly systematic. On the contrary, diverse and episodic pronouncements prevail, having as their common denominator a scriptural theology. Duncan Forrester expresses well a kind of hesitation in the area of social justice on the part of Protestant theologies when he writes: “Theology or Christian thought must have something distinctive to offer to the discussion, or it might as well keep its mouth shut – such is a typically Protestant

⁹ B. Buchtová (ed.), *Nezaměstnanost. Psychologický, ekonomický a sociální problém* (Praha: Grada, 2002), p. 100.

¹⁰ M. Brown, Annex I, ‘Some thoughts on theological method’ in *Unemployment and the Future of Work, An Enquiry for the Churches* (London: Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, 1997), p. 298.

¹¹ D.B. Forrester, ‘Social Justice and Welfare’ in G. Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 196.

approach.”¹² Forrester also claims that genuine Protestant thought, though scripture-based, can reach beyond the inner discourse of religious communities and speak in the public arena.¹³

Public character is much more natural for Catholic social ethics which uses, for the most part, theologically neutral language of natural law. Right social behaviour is based on the intentions of God in creation and stamped into the structure of nature. Behind this there is a notion that reason, though affected and weakened by sin, is not in conflict with revelation, and these two together illuminate the condition of human beings. In practice, then,

[the Church] marks the boundaries and puts up signposts, but she does not ordinarily prescribe the route to be taken to the goal in question... Neither the encyclicals, nor St. Thomas’ theological summa, nor any catechism of Christian social principles can tell him exactly what he has to do under these specific circumstances. The Church will show him the directions, but she will not and cannot relieve him of that responsibility which is the sequel of the “law of freedom” (Jas. 1:25), “the liberty which we enjoy in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 2:4).¹⁴

A modern instrument of describing the ideas of the Catholic social teaching is the papal social encyclical. *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII, which was issued in 1891, and was the first of its kind. Regarding employment, *Rerum Novarum* says: “Among the purposes of a society should be to try to arrange for a continuous supply of work at all times and seasons; and to create a fund from which the members may be helped in their necessities, not only in case of accident but also in sickness, old age, and misfortune.”¹⁵ This statement, vague as it may seem now, was important as a choice (or a pronouncement) of attitude the Catholic Church made more than a century ago. Since then a range of social encyclicals have followed. Two more recent and pertinent to my argument will be introduced now.

“From the very beginning ... (man) is called to work” says the preamble of *Laborem Exercens* (hereafter LE), an encyclical of John Paul

¹² Ibid., p. 197.

¹³ Ibid., p. 204. At the end of his essay Forrester writes: “So perhaps biblical insights into justice of the sort that Christianity characteristically offers may still have something useful to say in the public forum and in the support of those who are striving to act justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly, with or **without knowing** that such is the way of God.” (pp. 206-207; boldface mine) This sentence might set off a discussion on the relation of revelation and reason, dogmatic, fundamental and ‘natural’ theology. Yet it would exceed the scope of this work.

¹⁴ F.H. Mueller, *The Church and the Social Question* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1984), pp. 15, 17-18.

¹⁵ *Rerum Novarum*, article 3. Cited in Mueller, *The Church and the Social Question*.

II from 1981. Work is what makes life more human. The theology of work used here is largely grounded on the first chapters of Genesis, together with the witness of the Gospel to Jesus as a manual worker. The Catholic method of complementarity between revelation and reason, on which I touched above, is presented well in article 4.1:

The Church is convinced that work is a fundamental dimension of man's existence on earth. She is confirmed in this conviction by considering the whole heritage of the many sciences devoted to man... they all seem to bear witness to this reality in an irrefutable way. But the source of the Church's conviction is above all the revealed word of God, and therefore what is *a conviction of the intellect* is also *a conviction of faith*.

Concerning work, LE stresses a need of a "suitable employment for all who are capable of it. The opposite of a just and right situation... is unemployment... which in all cases is an evil, and which, when it reaches a certain level, can become a real social disaster." It is the state that must act decisively against unemployment by overall planning. However, there is not much more to find on the problem of unemployment, let alone to mention an active role of the Church in it.

Ronald Preston is right in his remarks that "there are problems in trying to give universal teaching on these matters".¹⁶ Unlike Paul VI, Preston continues, the present pope is more ambitious, "but in several respects the universal frame of reference of the teaching needs qualifying". Also, in respect to the behaviour of the Church as an employer, and individual Christians as both workers and the unemployed, I miss some guidelines. Christian community as such is not addressed by the document.

The other encyclical I will present is *Centesimus Annus* (hereafter CA), which came to light in 1991 to commemorate a hundred-year anniversary of *Rerum Novarum*. CA is much more concretely oriented than LE. It is said that the spirit of CA was very much influenced by American conservative thought.¹⁷ This assumption is grounded on a generally positive attitude to the market economy, while the role of the state is less emphasised, and the Welfare State is treated altogether in a negative way. "(CA) however, maintains that the state should protect the worker against

¹⁶ R.J. Elford and I.S. Markham (eds.), *The Middle Way. Theology, Politics and Economics in the Later Thought of R.H. Preston* (London: SCM Press, 2000), p. 169.

¹⁷ A good example of this approach to social ethics is in M. Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1992), on employment esp. pp. 109-111. It stresses religious motivation to work, independence, compassion and freedom, which Olasky defines "not as the opportunity to do anything with anyone at any time, but as the opportunity to work and worship without governmental restrictions" (p. 111).

the nightmare of unemployment”.¹⁸ This statement in itself exceeds the pure market economy theory and a qualifier, ‘social’, might be added.

CA continues in the tradition begun by John XXIII of addressing “all men and women of good will”. This signifies that social encyclicals are intended to become a subject of public discourse. The audience of CA is the world after the breakthrough of 1989, and the whole of chapter three refers to the changes that followed.

The criticism of the so-called Welfare State points at excesses and abuses in recent years. The State’s interventions are said to deprive society of its responsibility and human energies while an enormous increase in spending takes place. As a critique of the former socialist economies, it is fully adequate, yet it seems slightly inconsistent with the rest of the encyclical, which is otherwise in favour of the ‘social’ market economy. Preston writes: “This passage seems to be by a different hand. One can only surmise why it is here.”¹⁹

Another striking difference, dating back to Vatican II, is a more scriptural approach to social theology when compared with a ‘pure’ natural law approach of *Rerum Novarum*. Obviously, this reflects some significant trends within the Catholic Church, such as an increasing biblical and ecumenical awareness.

I began this chapter with a question on the legitimacy of the Church’s engagement in the world of work and then demonstrated that both Protestant and Catholic traditions answer the question in a positive way. Now I will attempt to summarise my findings of the basic methodological and theological principles of the Catholic social doctrine, namely with regard to work, and then provide some critical comments.

- Since *Rerum Novarum* the pope has arrogated to teach about work and employment and has not hesitated to address the state’s officials. The Church believes she has a right and a duty to do so but if she wants to remain a credible partner in contemporary public debate, she has to be able and willing to *intelligibly* explain the presuppositions of her right to speak. The mere fact that Vatican officials as representatives of the sovereign Vatican State used to be invited to world conferences cannot be the sole reason.
- The source of social ethics of the Catholic Church is primarily the revealed word of God, while at the same time it must not be ignorant of

¹⁸ Elford and Markham (eds.), *The Middle Way*, p. 185.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

secular sciences, especially at the stage of analysis of the present condition.

- The social ethics of the Catholic Church uses more and more extensively the scriptural theology while not resigning to the adequacy of natural law, or 'Catholic naturalism' as Don Browning labels it.²⁰ A recent example of the former was a widely used Old Testament model of Jubilee Year and Sabbath Economics in connection with the year 2000.
- Private property is valued but, at the end of the day, both private and collective property are intended to serve the common good of human beings.
- CA lifted up again the role of the market economy. However it also admitted the legitimacy of moderate interventions in favour of the weaker and poorer.

Reflecting critically on the Catholic social doctrine, I find its weak point especially in the effort to speak universally. Mostly, as a result, the pronouncements are too vague and empty. There are two other related problems:

- Teaching is addressed to 'the world', while a direct calling on particular Christian communities with their particular pastoral problems is missing. Where are some guidelines for the Church as an employer and an investor? Where are challenges to individual Christians to start private enterprises that would create more jobs? Where is some specification of the comfort and support the Church should provide to her jobless members and the unemployed in the wider community? Most writings stay on too general a level.
- Catholic social ethics derives mostly from general principles, neglecting the need for a thorough reflection of reality, which is after all 'God's reality'. This is the problem of a lack of analytical thinking. Also, with a huge simplification, I dare to say that this may be a failure in theological method. Was not most of Christian doctrine in the first centuries formulated on the basis of reflection on God's dealing with the people? Neo-scholastic preference of a deductive approach may not be very helpful here.²¹

²⁰ D. Browning, 'World Family Trends' in Gill, *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Ethics*.

²¹ More on the methodological shift in theology towards deduction in F.S. Fiorenza and J.P. Galvin, *Systematická teologie I* (Brno: CDK, Praha: Vyšehrad, 1998), pp. 34-41.

III. Work, Employment and the Catholic Church in the Czech Republic

Having described the pastoral problem in chapter one and gone through the tradition of the social ethics of the Catholic Church in chapter two, I now turn to researching the ways the Catholic community in the Czech Republic responds to unemployment. In the first section of this chapter the *Peace and Good* document will be critically presented. The second section will discuss some local initiatives, and also proposals of other possible approaches.

The Social Charter *Peace and Good*

The representative voice of the Czech Episcopal Conference to the social questions was published in 2000. The document was intended, not as an ultimate answer to pertinent problems, but as material for public discussion. A team of authors, composed mainly of Czech Christian Academy members, was appointed by the bishops. Later it also co-operated with experts from the Ecumenical Council of Churches. A general objective set in the beginning was to “introduce the views of the social doctrine of the church at the pressing issues of our time to a wider public”. Compared with the papal encyclicals, this document has an advantage in addressing very particular issues. *Peace and Good* (hereafter PG) is ambitious in its scope and extent. However, for the purpose of this work I will focus exclusively on chapter six, which discusses the issue of work.

“Our society has already suffered from a social evil of *unemployment* for some time”, says PG in article 38. It shows understanding for the reasons of unemployment resulting from economic transformation but also stresses that finding ways towards a decrease of joblessness is a duty of all involved: employers, trade unions, state and public authorities, and workers. It is praiseworthy when the state or the town set up support projects, support counselling and clubs in favour of the afflicted. In addition, brand new ways of being active should be sought apart from the market and its mechanisms.

PG is apparently influenced by CA. As for the forms of help, PG prefers programmes of community welfare work to social help, and financing of work instead of financing of unemployment. It also says, “It is good ‘to have a job’ and work honestly as an employee. But more praiseworthy is to independently undertake and create jobs for the other.”

Article 39 finally discusses the engagement of the Church. PG claims that the Christian churches are on the side of those who suffer from social injustice, who are marginalised and become victims of poorly functioning political and economic order.

Social work, charity, has always been the field in which a Christian can testify to his or her love for the other, and where they can also find a deep meaning of life even for themselves. The institutionalized charities of the churches, limited by their possibilities, sources and strength, struggle to mitigate the negative consequences of social development by their dedicated social work.

PG appreciates this work and at the same time is aware of its limits.

What is needed, according to PG, is both a reform of institutions and of steps which lead to serious social problems. Also, false ideologies of the structures that generate the evil should be disclosed. Unemployment is even resembled to the class division of society and as such is warned against since it might become a 'detonator' of social fights. To sum up, Christianity cannot give up its struggle for social justice.

Several concluding points could be made. Firstly, PG specifies the 'general' social teaching of the Catholic Church for local conditions. Therefore, it must be based on some kind of analysis, and this is its strength in comparison with the encyclicals, which are too vague. Secondly, PG takes over the encyclicals' theology of work and does not develop any independent and advanced theology on its own, e.g. that which would be grounded in the community's faith and experience. This is the weakness of the document. Thirdly, PG appreciates the work of the ecclesial charity but does not specify or proscribe directions the charity should take. Higher specification in the ways of fighting unemployment would be helpful, especially when the document is otherwise quite concrete.

The Practice of the Church in the Treatment of Unemployment

So far I have been engaged solely in the review of statements and doctrines. Now an important step should be made towards practice.

The question can be asked to what extent the churches have been able to go beyond the written statements in order to implement the consequences of their convictions into actual practice. It is clear

that churches can only criticize other institutions in a credible way if they apply the same standards of criticism to their own policies and actions.²²

Here are several initial observations. The Church's former property has not been fully compensated, that is why she cannot become a significant job provider. In addition, quite a strong sense of non-engagement attitude prevails in the Church as a residuum of the former regime's propaganda. The argument sounds like this: work is not a spiritual matter and thus is not the Church's business.

The following observations from the Catholic community of Kutna Hora should serve as an example of a response to unemployment by the Church. The Regional Charity in Kutna Hora has employed tens of people over recent years, mainly women and school leavers, who were registered by the Office of Work. The Charity offers them jobs, mostly in social work, and the state covers most of the expenditure. Obviously, confession of the employee does not matter. Yet, this activity can reach mainly low-skilled people because only this group usually accepts poorly paid jobs. Moreover, the Charity's capacity is limited.

Another programme is focused on the free time of the jobless. A club is at work whose activities consist of manual work such as sewing, cooking and the production of small things. The club has proved very successful because participants not only learn something new but also are not alone. Finally, since the Christian community in Kutna Hora has some income from tourism, it can give jobs to several people.

Although the community in Kutna Hora is working together quite well, this is obviously not sufficient. The key problem, as I see it, is that unemployment is not identified as a distinctive pastoral issue that deserves special care, although it should, given Catholic social teaching. The community should integrate the issue of unemployment into its overall mission and evolve it also in theological terms. Better understanding of the needs of the jobless and their families should be shown in terms of financial help, offers of 'free time' activities, offers to host and animate support groups. Another proposal is to motivate and support people who wish to start a private enterprise. Instead of a popular critique of undertaking, more stress should be put on the praiseworthiness and benefit of private enterprise. This is especially important where trust in the undertaking is not obvious at all.

²² Green, *Labour, Employment and Unemployment*, p. 69.

Of course, if there are enough human and financial resources in the community, more can be done. Counselling, for example, is important without doubt, both psychosocial focused on coping with the new situation, and work-counselling consisting of helping people to ask for welfare and get a new job. But to provide proper counselling, you need skilled workers. Besides, as I suggested above, some communities can even afford to create jobs. This opportunity should be realised as much as possible and jobs offered to the people who are in urgent need.

Conclusion

One of my opening questions was whether it is the task of the churches to deal with unemployment or whether they should confine themselves to the Gospel. The social teaching of the Catholic Church claims that the choice is not either work or the Gospel, but that being faithful to the Gospel includes working out the Gospel's (and more widely the Scriptures') implications for social ethics. Moreover, an adequate theological work needs not only an analysis of tradition but also an analysis of the pastoral situation. That is why I included a chapter on unemployment in the Czech Republic.

If I had to summarise my findings concerning a response of the Church to unemployment, I could say that the social encyclicals as well as PG identify the problem of unemployment and encourage the Church to get engaged in solving this problem. The Christian community should do this, not as an optional extra, but as a substantial part of the Church's social mission.

The parable of the workers in the vineyard in Matthew 20 uses employing and receiving wages as symbols of the kingdom of heaven. I believe the choice of Jesus of this image was not accidental, because people who encounter an unexpected and generous offer to work can really speak about the reality of God, or the kingdom of heaven, that breaks into our world. Such is their experience. The Church is invited to embody the Gospel and follow Jesus even in very 'worldly' matters such as work.

Bc. Mgr. Petr Jandejsek graduated from the Institute of Ecumenical Studies in Prague, Czech Republic. His professional background is in social work whilst having an interest in ecumenism and theology. He continues his studies through the Cambridge Theological Federation and in 2002-3 he was a part-time student at IBTS. His dissertation will research the ecumenical legacy of the Czech reformer, Jan Hus.

Evangelical Scholars address Public Theology

Theology must address civic and public life if it is to be faithful to Christ and scripture. That was the core theme of the Biannual Conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians (FEET), 13-17 August 2004 in Wölmersen, Germany, moderated by Dr Cristoph Stenschke (FEET Secretary and Dozent at Bibelschule Wiedenest, Germany), and addressed by FEET Chairman, Prof Henri Blocher (lecturing at Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée, Aux-en-Provence, France, and Wheaton College USA). With the expansion of the European Union eastward and southward and the new EU Constitution very much on their minds, more than sixty theologians from a dozen countries of the wider Europe gathered to consider 'Evangelical Models for Public Theology'.

Christian public theology is understood as the activity of critically understanding our life in the world and in community – in matters of government (international, national and local), law, social issues and communal concern – in light of God's revelation in scripture. It refers to the engagement of living Christian ecclesial bodies with their public environment – the economic, political, and cultural spheres of our common life.

The five main sessions looked at public theology from distinct but related angles. Dr Hetty Lalleman-de Winkel, a Dutch scholar teaching at Spurgeon's College, London, commended the Old Testament as a rich resource for modern-day social engagement, from its accounts of creation and God's Kingship, to its varied prophetic texts; with a response from Prof. Pierre Berthoud from Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée.

Dr Bruce Winter, an Australian scholar and Warden of Tyndale House, Cambridge, showed how members of the New Testament Church sought 'the welfare of the city' as civic benefactors. His respondent was Dr Jürg Buchegger from Buchs SG, Switzerland.

Professor Andrew McGowan of the Highland Theological College in Scotland explored the ways in which church history can inform public theology. He assessed four key models of church-state relationships. Dr Ian Randall, Deputy Principal of Spurgeon's College and Senior Research Fellow at IBTS, gave a lively response from an Anabaptist perspective.

Dr Pavel Hošek from the Evangelical Theological Seminary of the Czech Church of the Brethren in Prague, who also lectures at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, demonstrated the value of systematic theological approaches to the vexed question of religious

pluralism. His account was complemented by the response of Dr Parush R Parushev, a Bulgarian theologian and Academic Dean at IBTS.

Dr Anna Robbins, an English Baptist theologian lecturing at the London School of Theology suggested that evangelicals can learn much from the achievements and failures of the models adopted by the World Council of Churches in social ethics since 1948. The Anglican scholar, Dr David Hilborn, President of the Evangelical Alliance of the UK, responded.

Issues in the main papers were explored further through discussion in seminars. Guided by Prof. Pierre Berthoud and Dr Gordon Campbell (lecturing at Faculté Libre de Théologie Réformée), participants looked further at the biblical basis of public theology. Dr Mark Elliott (lecturer at the University of St Andrews, Scotland), Dr Ian Randall and Dr Leonardo De Chirico (lecturing at Istituto di Formazione Evangelica e Documentazione, Padova, Italy) led group discussion in assessing historic and contemporary contributions to public theology of the patristic, Anabaptist and Roman Catholic streams of Christian tradition. Dr David Hilborn's panoramic presentations stimulated critical evaluations of the broad range of philosophical and evangelical approaches to the concepts and language of human rights. The conference continued with different evangelical theological disciplines meeting in working groups. Finally, the renown biblical scholar Prof I Howard Marshall of Aberdeen University summarised the discussion and outlined the conference's findings in developing a sound evangelical public theology.

Each day began with morning prayers and the conference ended with a prayer service led by Dr Pavel Černý, President of the Czech Church of the Brethren and lecturer at the Evangelical Theological Seminary, Prague. Prof I Howard Marshall led a daily series of Bible studies which combined close exegesis, pastoral reflections and illustrations from current affairs, to confirm that Christians have a deep responsibility for public life.

The conference was marked by creative dialogue both within and outside the formal sessions, and insights gained will no doubt feed into seminary and college programmes! Delegates decided to set up a special theological study group on the EU Constitution, to be moderated by Dr David Hilborn. Papers from the conference will appear in forthcoming issues of the FEET *European Journal of Theology*. For more information about the conference and future FEET events, contact Dr Christoph Stenschke at Cstenschke@t-online.de.

The Revd Dr Parush R Parushev
Academic Dean and Director of Applied Theology, IBTS

Book Reviews

Peter Shepherd

The making of a northern Baptist College

Northern Baptist College, Manchester, United Kingdom, 2004, £24.99

This is a workmanlike account of one of the member colleges of the Consortium of European Baptist Theological Schools. The Northern Baptist College (NBC), linked ecumenically to the University of Manchester, has an interesting story to tell. Peter Shepherd describes early attempts at non-formal theological education in the north of England, especially the work of John Fawcett (Particular Baptist) and Dan Taylor (New Connexion General Baptist). The formation of the Northern Education Society in 1804 marked a significant advance. Shepherd tells the stories of Horton, Rawdon, the East Midlands College, Accrington, Bury and Manchester, all forming part of the story of NBC, which has been a pioneering institution in the field of theological education, especially under the leadership of Michael Taylor, its Principal from 1969-1985.

For those engaged in developing theological institutions throughout Europe, this history will provide an encouraging story of how progress can be made. Unfortunately the book lacks adequate information from the perspective of the students; and the scope of the book means there is insufficient detail provided on the curriculum adopted at various points in the history. Nevertheless, it is still a worthwhile resource.

Ken R Manley

Redeeming Love Proclaim: John Rippon and the Baptists

Paternoster Press, 2004. 339pp. £24.99

Ken Manley, an alumnus of IBTS and a Vice President of the BWA, has had a distinguished career as a pastor and scholar. This study is an excellent resource for those seeking to understand the development of evangelical Calvinism amongst British Baptists of the 1700s. Rippon is a key figure and Manley devotes space to his hymnody, which influenced baptistic life and thought in Europe and north America. He was an activist and recorder, involved in so many aspects of emerging Baptist life, not least through the *Baptist Annual Register* from 1790 until 1802. Manley covers all aspects of his life well and we are indebted to him for this fine work.

The Revd Keith G Jones

Rector, IBTS